

HERO VS. ANTIHERO : SPATIAL FORM AND THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE DEPARTMENT OF GRAPHIC DESIGN AND  
THE INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS  
OF  
BILKENT UNIVERSITY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS

By  
Gökhan Ersoy  
June, 1997

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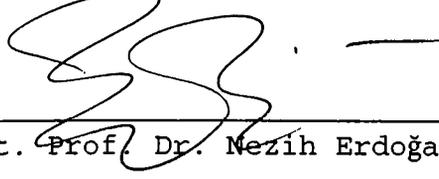
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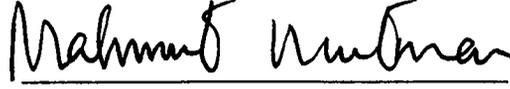
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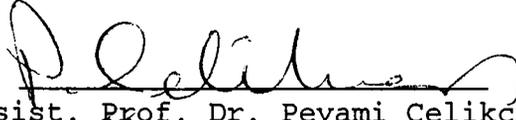
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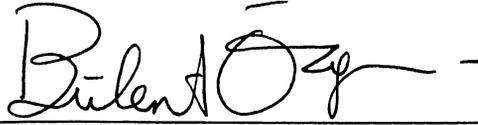
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ABSTRACT

HERO VS. ANTIHERO: SPATIAL FORM AND THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

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M.F.A. in Graphical Arts

Supervisor: Nezhir Erdogan

June, 1997

This study departs to investigate the relations between the formal aspects of the contemporary graphic novel and the fictional character portrayed within these works. The transformation of the comics form into the graphic novel is examined with regard to the intention to attain spatiality on both the verbal and the visual dimensions of the medium. In this context, the transformation of the traditional comics hero into the antihero of the contemporary graphic novels is analyzed in relation to the visual representation of the character and the composition of the work through the fictional strategies collected under the literary theory of spatial form in narrative.

Keywords: Hero, Antihero, Spatial Form, Comics, Graphic Novel.

## ÖZET

KAHRAMAN ANTI-KAHRAMANA KARŞI: UZAMSAL BİÇİM VE GRAFİK ROMAN

Gökhan Ersan

Grafik Tasarım Bölümü

Yüksek Lisans

Tez Yöneticisi: Nezh Erdođan

Haziran, 1997

Bu alıřmada, agdař grafik romanın biimsel zellikleri ile bu iřlerde ele alınan kurgusal karakter arasındaki iliřkilerin incelenmesi amalanıyor. izgi roman biiminin grafik romana dnüşümü, bu medyanın hem sözel hem de görsel boyutlarda uzamsallığı yakalama eğilimiyle ele alınıyor. Bu bağlamda, geleneksel izgi roman kahramanının agdař grafik roman anti-kahramanına dnüşümü, karakterin görsel temsili ve anlatının kompozisyonu ile iliřkili olarak inceleniyor. Kompozisyon boyutunda 'anlatıda uzamsal biim' adlı yazınsal kuram altında toplanan kurgusal stratejiler odak noktasını oluřturuyor.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Kahraman, Karşı-kahraman, Uzamsal Biim, izgi Roman, Grafik Roman.

to Perihan Hacıođlu

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. An Aesthetic History of Comics with regard to the Fictional Character

As a unique fictional form which is powered by the co-existence of words and pictures, comics emerged towards the turn of the century. The pioneering creators were to conceptualize in comics, the mechanics of film long before the form's existence. Thus, comics embarked on a course - with ideals reflecting those of cinema - which in time brought about production of forward thrusting, sequential narratives on the way to appropriating formal qualities inherent to film on their two dimensional picture plane, that is, the page.

The earliest experiments of comics in the modern sense were conducted by Swiss educator and author Rodolphe Topffer at the first half of the 19th century. In Topffer, comics grew their sequential character which anticipates invention of

"cinematic" storytelling techniques a half-century prior to the emergence of cinema (Spiegelman 62). He studied physiognomy to pose as the first attempt to analyze ways of cartooning the character. Topffer's books inspired another generation of picture-story artists who would produce the truly first comics. Among these works Wilhelm Busch's creation Max and Moritz provides the bound into the comic strip as we know it. However, the form truly flourished in American comic supplements which appeared at the turn of the century. William Randolph Hearst had commissioned an American artist to create The Katzenjammer Kids, a comic strip based on Busch's book. Works like Richard Outcalt's The Yellow Kid followed which were blending slapstick humor with manic energy that would lay the foundations to the mainstream comic strip. Except for a few, shortlived individual experiments - conducted by George Herriman, Winsor McKay and Lionel Feininger - these early comic strips were about to depict action throughout uniform, identically shaped panels. Linear sequence was vital to the narration.

The modern comic book was invented in the 1930s when the Sunday newspaper strips were reprinted in book form. Apart from exceptional works like Will Eisner's 1940s The Spirit, comic books simply remained to be strips pasted on top of each other to form a page which then extended over several pages to be transformed into book form. These books demanded that the audience - who are more familiar with the

conventions of print narratives - read the panels in the order of left-to-right and top-to-bottom. So was born the comics tradition. The formal strategies which took shape in these early comic books remained unchanged and unquestioned to a great extent until the emergence of the graphic novel of the 80s.

The first comic book, a package of newspaper comic-strip reprints, appeared in 1933. When the publishers soon began running out of strips to reprint, the first comic book of original material on a single theme - Detective Comics # 1 - was published in 1937 by National Publications. During this time period two teenagers - writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Schuster - began creating an adventure comics called Superman which after four years of rejection from major syndicates was sold in 1937 to National Publications (later to be known as DC Comics). Siegel and Schuster's presentation strips were pasted up in the new comic book format and debuted in Action Comics #1 in June 1938. Batman, co-created by artist Bob Kane and writer Bill Finger, appeared a year later, constructing National Publications as the industry leader (Schumer 112). In the person of the self-righteous, omnipotent Superman an ideal hero took shape and was broadly customized throughout comics. The adventure hero was heroic and invulnerable whose stories demanded dramatization of dynamic action where he accomplished various astounding feats. In the tradition that was built by

Alex Raymond's Flash Gordon and Hal Foster's Tarzan, the focus was to render the dynamic figure in action. This particular approach to rendering the human figure became the house style, actualized in the figure drawing teachings of Burne Hogarth - the artist who was successor to Hal Foster in the Tarzan comics.

In the earliest portrayals, Superman had been a kind of social worker, in the comics' words, a champion of the oppressed, reflecting the liberal idealism of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. Drunks, wife batterers, gamblers and exploiting employers received his attention. Then, when the cold war came to America, the character evolved into a fantasy guardian of the world order: an all-powerful, and at times a conservative, fighting for truth, justice, and the American way (Sabin 61). The point to be underlined is that Superman was busy with accomplishing feats and had no time for introspection. A solid iconic figure he was always on the move as stressed by the forward thrusting nature of its panels.

Superman and Batman founded complementary superhero paradigms - supernatural versus super-athlete, strength versus wit and day versus night - which would constitute the model for the hero until the 1960s when the Marvel Age of Comics would dawn with a whole new set of characters to bring into question the politics for the hero.

The first mainstream comic book antiheroes were created by writer Stan Lee and artist Jack Kirby as Marvel Comics publications, the first character being Stan Lee's Spider-man which appeared on the pages of Amazing Fantasy #15, in 1962. The Marvel hero is a radical re-assessment of the 1930s' straightforward costumed protagonists Superman or Batman. During the character's debut, Spider-man's stance is made explicit by writer Lee in the opening page of the "Amazing Fantasy #15":

Like costumed heroes? Confidentially, we in the comic mag business refer to them as "long underwear characters"! And as you know, they're a dime a dozen! But we think you may find our Spider-man just a bit... Different.

Contrary to Superman or Batman, Spider-man is a vulnerable, confused, and unpredictable character who does not possess a set of inborn ethical values which are to shape his latter actions. And actually Spider-man supplies a better reason, to his heroicism, for, "with great power there must also come great responsibility" ("Amazing Fantasy #15" 11). Lee combines soap-opera-influenced story structures and light-hearted comedy to counter the rather solemn self-righteousness of the DC heroes. Spider-man is the archetype of this approach.

Although they still functioned within the confines of the traditional comic book form, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby have foregrounded self-expression in the comics mainstream which

was formerly characterized by anonymity of assembly-line production. Lee's prose was balanced by power-packed, dynamic artwork of Jack Kirby, who went on to create with him the basic line of Marvel Comics heroes. Driven by enigmatic figures like the Fantastic Four - a team of ill-fated scientists - or the cosmic wanderer Silver Surfer, the Kirby universe exploded with concepts and characters that appeared to leap off the page. Kirby's initial experience in cartoon animation and the influence of former mentors Alex Raymond and Hal Foster underscore this approach of portraying the dynamic figure in action. However, Kirby managed, along with writer Stan Lee to bring his self expression to the stories. He broke away from the art school norms of realistic figure rendering and ventured into developing an expressive, personal style. His signature approach to the human anatomy became a house style in the 60s and still partly reigns over the comic book mainstream. However, throughout the 1970s in Neil Adams' artwork, it was observed if superheroes really existed they would have to look like the ones he drew. Adams' approach to anatomy largely disabled self-expression. This house style which once again brought comics cartooning closer to realistic depiction, was adopted by a younger generation of artists who carried the style to the present day, so that it constituted the definitive look of the comic book mainstream. However, in the divergence from that traditional mode, comics creators referred back to those few short-lived

individual experiments which have foreseen the contemporary graphic novel. Those experiments constituted a stepping stone for the radical reassessment of the form which took place in the 1980s. So it is appropriate at this point, to provide a retrospective insight into those former individual works.

Comics' recognition of the page as a potential picture plane can be traced back to the works of Winsor McKay in the 1906s and to Will Eisner in the 1940s. Although these works do not define the look of the comics in their own time, they are recognized especially in the 1980s by the creators who would then go on to create the contemporary graphic novel. These works are also marked by their depiction of the hero, which might be considered subversive when contrasted to the model-hero of the mainstream comics.

The individual experiments of Winsor McKay in Little Nemo in Slumberland showcases the recognition of the design significance of a panel's shape and size, and how these individual panels combine to form a coherent visual whole. Although McKay brought into comics this recognition by varying the size and shapes of the frames - a seminal figure in the early history of the animated cartoon - he devised a sensibility towards his panels which led them to progress with a cinematic sense of frame to frame movement. Thus, he still arranges the panels in a linear manner. McKay usually

numbered the frames so that they are read in their intended sequence: from left to right, top to bottom.

With the inauguration of his seminal work, Will Eisner laid the foundations to the one-shot, non-episodic, long form, book format comics. On June 2, 1940, Will Eisner introduced The Spirit, a hero who was self-doubting and confused. Eisner who had set out to create a series of short stories, was forced by the syndicate to come up with a costumed character (O'Sullivan 96). The reluctant hero was involved in a series of ill-fated adventures, each of which would end accidentally and ambiguously. Unlike Superman's Metropolis and Batman's Gotham, which are glamorous symbols of modern progress, Spirit's city is a sad stage of urban decay, possessing a "cunning life of its own", a catalyst for the many misadventures that develop there (O'Sullivan 96). Unlike the tentative nature of The Spirit himself, the city is definitely aggressive. Eisner's comic book is marked by the urban setting, interior monologue, and a sense of wonder at the absurdity of the world. Spirit introduced, opposed to the adventure comics, introspection which suggested a break from the dominantly external traits of the mainstream hero and a move towards internalization of the character which led to the comics antihero.

In 1978 the first comic book addressed to as a graphic novel - A Contract With God - was released by Will Eisner of the

Spirit fame. Soon, influenced by the early experiments in the comics form - mostly those of McKay and then Will Eisner - Frank Miller's 1980 series Daredevil arrived as the very first incarnations of the radical re-assessment of the comic book form and the hero. Daredevil is a costumed hero following the Superman tradition. The blind lawyer Matt Murdock has sworn to fight bullies of the like who had murdered his father by the aid of his heightened remaining senses and his training in the martial arts. Having assigned to the character in 1979, Miller started to conduct a great variety of storytelling strategies which broke away from the tradition. A year later he was also writing the stories in which the former, more straightforward Daredevil was placed before unorthodox circumstances that would force him to inquire about his stance in those settings. For Miller's Daredevil, New York's Hell's Kitchen suddenly turns into an uncanny stage to act righteously and to overcome evil at the same time. This Daredevil has doubts, weaknesses, personal problems, woes, and has to engage in a more complex and uncertain world where the good doesn't always conquer over evil. No longer an invulnerable defender of justice who is immune to threats against his mental unity, Daredevil will also have to deal with psychological problems resulting from the strains of the situations that he is involved in.

While Daredevil is made to realize the ambiguity of his story world, Miller realizes that it is essential to disrupt

the temporal, linear succession of the panels which function as storyboards to mimic cinema, so that this ambiguity is conveyed visually on the comics page. Like McKay's Little Nemo or Eisner's Spirit it is observed in Daredevil that the significance of the page as a whole overcomes the conception of the single panel as the basic unit of the comics page. Miller's experience on the Daredevil series brought about his groundbreaking work that would establish the term graphic novel.

It was stated earlier that the first comics called a graphic novel is Will Eisner's 1978 A Contract With God. However, it wasn't until 1986 that the graphic novel really took off. Frank Miller's experience on the Daredevil series led him towards more radical experiments in 1986's Batman: The Dark Knight Returns - a revisionist Batman story - that spanned wide interest and established the long form comics format. With the graphic novel format the writer-artist was freed from the constraints of the traditional comics which usually had to reach a climax only after the 22 pages of the early format. But most importantly, the writer was freed from the demands of the continuity of the periodical and found the freedom of exploration in self-expression and development of a personal style. Strict rules of continuity had caused suppression of personal styles, since the creator had to adopt a house style - in rendering the figure, staging action, arranging panels, putting down sound effects, et al.

- popularized by former artists like Alex Raymond, Jack Kirby or Neil Adams. Now, singular themes could be tackled regardless of any preconceived set of rules defining the character and its settings. Batman: The Dark Knight Returns achieved success on these premises where Frank Miller was given complete control over his work. The story, of course, appeared outside the Batman continuity. In Frank Miller, emerged the artist-writer as the comic book auteur - a radical break from the assembly-line production of comics which were created by anonymous collaborators. Thus, artists and writers became credited on the covers. In Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, Batman comes out of retirement, a disturbed personality. The startling reinterpretation of this superheroic icon is underscored by Miller's unorthodox graphic treatment. The rendering of the heroic figure changes from scene to scene, diverges from the homogeneous house style and heads towards a heterogeneity of representations throughout the book. The rendering is simplified into abstraction, into a variety of caricatures of Batman. With the advent of Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, individual graphic styling found a breathing space over the constraints of the house style. The further step was Miller's collaboration with illustrator Bill Sienkiewicz for Daredevil: In Love and War and Elektra: Assassin in 1986. Sienkiewicz abandoned conventional linear comic book illustrative methods that promoted the stable iconic character - the traditional cartoon - altogether for both

books. Instead, the panels were painted in full color, shapes and figures were defined by hues and tones rather than by line. His treatment of the human face and form was stylized, bent into abstract caricatures of the personalities of the characters.

Although the first examples of graphic novels were superhero revisionist stories like the Watchmen in 1986, Alan Moore and Brian Bolland's Killing Joke in 1988; or Grant Morrison and Dave McKean's Arkham Asylum in 1990, the form flourished regardless of subject matter in works such as Dave McKean and Neil Gaiman's autobiographical Mr.Punch ; Bill Sienkiewicz' political documentary Brought to Light; Frank Miller's comics noir A Dame to Kill for: A Tale from Sin City; Brian Talbot's The Tale of One Bad Rat on a child abuse theme; Alan Moore's political thriller V For Vendetta; Will Eisner's account of the historical metamorphosis of a single New York street Dropsie Avenue: The Neighbourhood; Moore and Sienkiewicz' social commentary Big Numbers; Frank Miller and Dave Gibbons' futuristic thriller Give Me Liberty; and Bill Sienkiewicz' biographical Voodoo Child.

It is observed that many other writers, artists and writer-artists followed to further question the limits of the comics form, creating ambiguous heroes which are conveyed through a wide variety of visual strategies. The common point of these books is that, in their explorations these

works finally stress the spatial nature of the comics page. This is the point where this study is to take off. In order to situate the form in its recently evolved position with regard to the hero it depicts.

## 1.2 The Theoretical Framework through the Notion of Spatiality

The transformation of the hero owes to the narrative strategies adopted by the writer of comics as well as the artist. In the case of the graphic novel, the tradition of mimesis is problematized both by the visual representation and the composition of the comics tableau which emphasize spatiality - the term referring to the "apprehension of a simultaneous coexistence of multiple elements in an autonomous form of organization, which is considerably different from that of the temporal order of these elements" (Saint-Martin xi). At the very nucleic level the comics tableau appears to be a potential pictorial basic plane, which follows the premise that visual language is an experience of space (Saint-Martin xi). The basic plane as suggested by Fernande Saint-Martin, is an energetic infrastructure prior to any actual production of the visual discourse. It is a material field which exists prior to the inscription of any mimetic or nonmimetic sign (78). This fact is recognized within the experiments conducted in graphic novels.

Another dimension to spatiality is added in the construction of the story world with the disruption of cause and effect sequences, by narrative devices which simultaneously put into question the notion of mimesis. The theory of spatial form designates the techniques by which the novelists "subvert the chronological sequence inherent in narrative" (Smitten 13). As conceived by literary critic Joseph Frank, the theory corresponds to the politics of certain fiction in creating a sense of the spatial/plastic arts with the written word so as to attain non-sequential, atemporal, non-linear narratives to promote paradigmatic readings.

It is observed that, when the contemporary graphic novel adopts spatial form - which suggests disruption of cause and effect models and a desire to overcome temporality - the medium is carried to another field of debate which tie this formal aspect to the problem of mimesis and the unity of the subject, which leads to the politics of modernism and postmodernism.

Postmodernist fiction which originates in the early experiments of modernist writers like James Joyce and Samuel Beckett is argued to possess an anti-mimetic quality (Varsava 1). In many cases the argument follows that, the formal plays devised by modernist writers so as to upset the conceptions of 19th century realism, in post-modernist

fiction have found response in the form of ridding discursive dimensions in favor of an empty formalism.

At the level of the fictional hero, the argument centers around the problems of heroism, unity of subject, and ethics. Modern novel departs from the traditional realist fiction which delighted readers partly by depicting a world full of agents engaging them in fantasies (Spacks 202). Varsava comments on the nature of certain modernist heroes that echo an earlier realist understanding who manage to preserve their normative ethical stance:

Even when the rest of the humankind is hellbound on a fast train (as it is in many modernist novels dealing with war and economic struggle), the modernist hero maintains moral stature, moral authority. In much modernist fiction, a kind of positive hero prevails....Ambiguity, indeterminacy, self-doubt in no way characterizes [the hero] (9).

The postmodernist fiction is either criticized by its lack of ethical dimension or hailed in contradiction for its reluctance to find easy paradigmatic codes for effective moral action. However, there is much agreement on the point that, this fiction possesses a satirical sensibility that privileges black humor, and mock heroic (Varsava 14).

As Brian McHale notes in The Postmodernist Fiction, particular works of early modernist writers intend to foreground,

The fundamental ontological discontinuity between the fictional and the real...in a way to model the discontinuity between our own mode of being and that of whatever divinity [emphasis mine] we may wish there were.(13)"

What lacks in these works is a sense of "consciousness as conscience" that is central to 19th century literature, while it is observed that the power of normative ethical discourse has diminished (Spacks 210). A disbelief in the divine, self-righteous hero is where many graphic novels are centered around. It is actually this erosion of the traditional hero that marks the very first works which revive those familiar, former valiant characters.

### 1.3 Statement of the Problem

As illustrated above, traditional comics throughout decades have been defined according to their temporal nature which derives from the fact that the form has emerged as an anticipation of cinematic storytelling executed on the comics page. With the incarnation of the traditional, linear mode of the comics and the resistance of the sequential succession of the comic book panels, also a model for the comics hero is established. This model hero is a self-conscious human subject who is engaged in dynamic action that is reinforced by the very linear form of the traditional comic book: Linearity or homogeneity is urged both by the linear succession of the panels and the linear rendering in the traditional cartooning style which assigns

the figure a stable iconic value. On a verbal level, the comics have functioned with the premises of realist fiction which depend on temporal succession of events obeying the laws of cause and effect. Divergence from that linear form has given way to the portrayal of characters which are underlined by their ambiguity, uncertainty and self-doubt.

The recognition of the comic book page as a potential picture plane, which is based on the notion of spatiality, paves the way for the radical reassessment of comics through the graphic novel format. The effect of spatiality is reinforced in the contemporary graphic novel by the adoption of a narrative technique, the spatial form which is devised in order to achieve in the literary work the effect of the plastic arts. Spatial form fiction functions to undermine the inherent consecutiveness of language, forcing the reader to perceive the elements of the work not as unrolling in time - or moving towards the consequences of action - but as juxtaposed in space, such that, the meaning is achieved by tying the fragments together or relating the various paradigms introduced; with a compositional act of the reader.

This study sets out to investigate the relations between the formal aspects of the contemporary graphic novel and the transformation of the hero portrayed within these works. It is argued that, graphic novel - the newly developed non-

linear form comics - reinforces the portrayal of the contemporary antihero which is now constructed out of fragments and located in a world which is molded within the plurality of subjective perspectives. The coherence of fictional character is problematized by this contemporary form on which the claims of modern and postmodern politics are projected and debated. While the hero had previously been understood in terms of its unity and completeness or self-sufficiency, the presence of the contemporary antihero is read from the multi-faceted character traits that are underscored by both the visual and the verbal dimensions of the narrative.

#### 1.4 Related Terms

Comics is the general term for the several formats of the medium. Comics creator and critic Will Eisner defines comics as "sequential art" (Comics 5). Another critic Scott McCloud provides a more comprehensive definition to the term based on the idea that comics are "mapping time through space" (qtd. in Groth) which is developed against an understanding that regards comics as derivative to film. McCloud's definition stands the one which is critically more in tune with the basic arguments of this study, for its recognition of juxtaposition as the vital feature in the dynamics of comics. The definition is as follows:

Comics n. plural in form, used in a singular  
verb. 1. Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in

deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer (McCloud 9).

Graphic novel, describes the bookshelf format, non-serialized comics which might extend from 48 to several hundred pages on a single theme.

Hero, or protagonist, is the major character in a literary work, the human center of interest.

Spatial Form, refers to the theory of fiction that designates the techniques by which the novelists subvert the chronological sequence inherent in narrative.

#### 1.5 Methods

Those works which pose to be representative of traditional and contemporary comics in terms of their spatiality, temporality and take on the fictional character are analyzed throughout this study - by means of surveying critical and historical literature.

#### 1.6 Limitations

As I aim to study the graphic novel and the hero within the perspective of the comics which start out in the turn-of-the-century comic strips, I will attend to the tradition which originates in those publications, so that the focus is

kept on the relationship between certain hero formations and the transformation of the comics form. Since this study is partly a comparative one within one tradition of comics which has spanned the graphic novel format, for keeping a clear focus on the continuity of the tradition that originates from the American newspaper strips, Japanese and European comics - which constitute a vital portion of the global comics culture - are not brought within the scope of this study. The underground comics, which are underscored by their adoption of the traditional mode of comics as a vehicle for social commentary rather than examining the formal devices of the medium are also not the primary concern of this study. Comics brought within the scope of this study are mainly graphic novels representative of the hero transformations within the medium. The samples introduced center around the works of contemporary comics writers Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman, artists Dave McKean, Bill Sienkiewicz and the writer-artist Frank Miller.

## CHAPTER 2

### RENDERING THE FIGURE: VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE HERO

#### 2.1. The Iconic Cartoon Figure: Line Art and the Coherence of the Hero

Iconic image is what characterizes the traditional comics. The portrayal of the traditional hero in simple line art historically has served to emphasize the unity of the character. An icon is an easily recognizable graphic sign. So, once assigned with certain qualities the hero represented by the iconic figure is expected to preserve them. The process can be traced back to an historical practice which is called physiognomy. The term defines the practice of coding character traits with animal features. It derives from a widespread 19th century belief that, by studying a person's outer physical features one can make inferences about that person's inner character. This approach is intended by cartoonists for instant communication or as the term goes: tagging. Which refers to "the importance of drawing a rich person to look rich" (qtd.

in White 15) as exemplified by Joe Kubert, the long time comics creator. Will Eisner believes that using animal-based stereotypes eases the involvement of the reader with the plot and gives the storyteller reader-acceptance for the action of his characters (44). In Eisner's words:

By employing characters who resemble animals, the graphic storyteller capitalizes on a residue of human primordial experience to personify actors quickly (44).

By these investments on the figure, further actions of the character are to be justified or to be provided with a primal cause.

Similarly, starting from the first comic strips Yellow Kid, Katzenjammer Kids, Flash Gordon and Tarzan, the employment of the iconic figure as a strong signifier of character attributes is clearly evidenced. However, the notion is brought further with the emergence of the magazine format comics and the first true comic book hero who helped establish a tradition. Approached within this perspective it becomes highly reasonable in Superman to infer that, the dignified iconic figure serves as a strong signifier in reinforcing the fictional unity of the character as well as the visual one (fig 2.1). The figure is almost architectonic as modeled by Joe Schuster (fig 2.2) while the costume is simply the naked figure dressed in flat colors. And since the costume colors remain exactly the same, panel after

figure 2.1

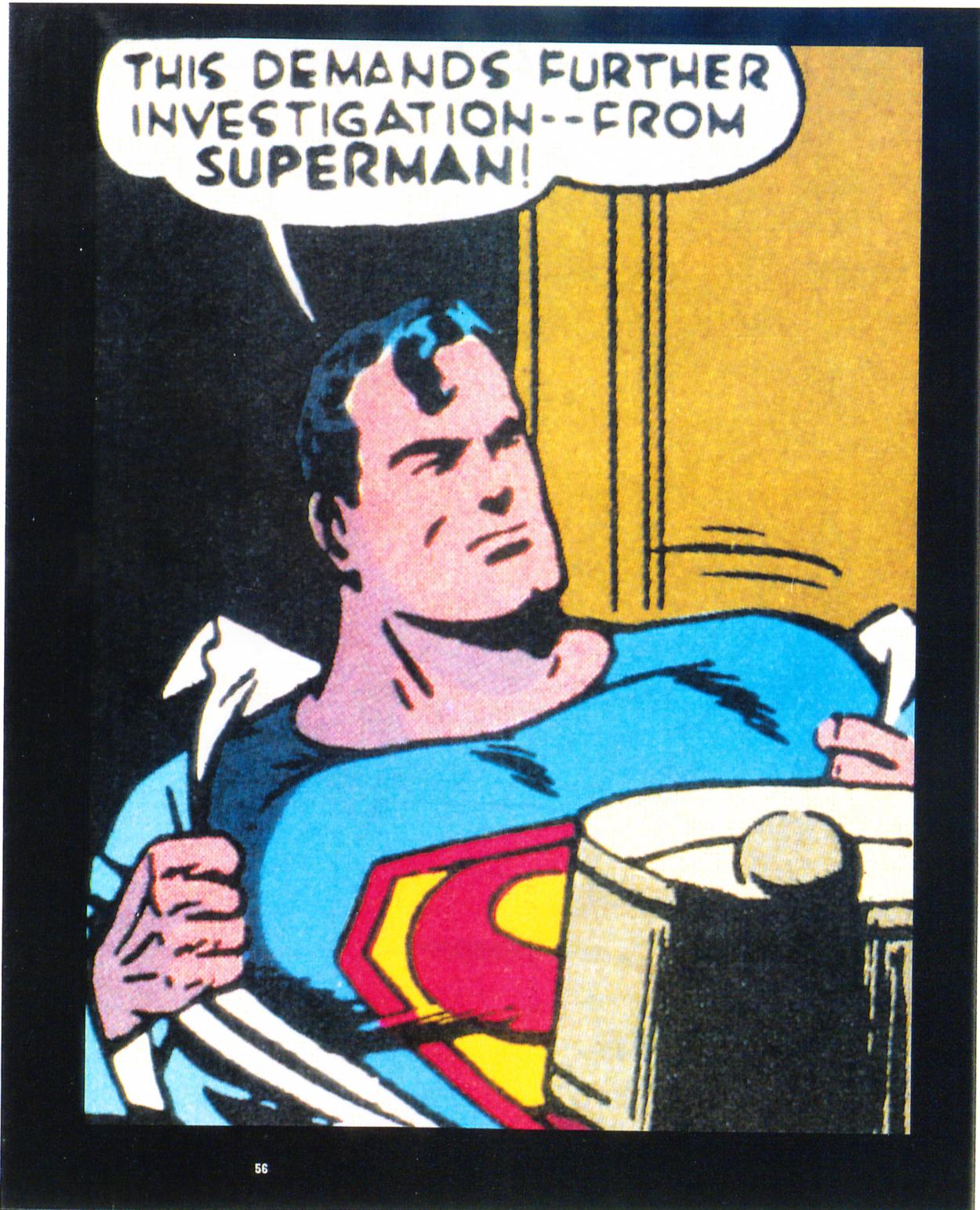
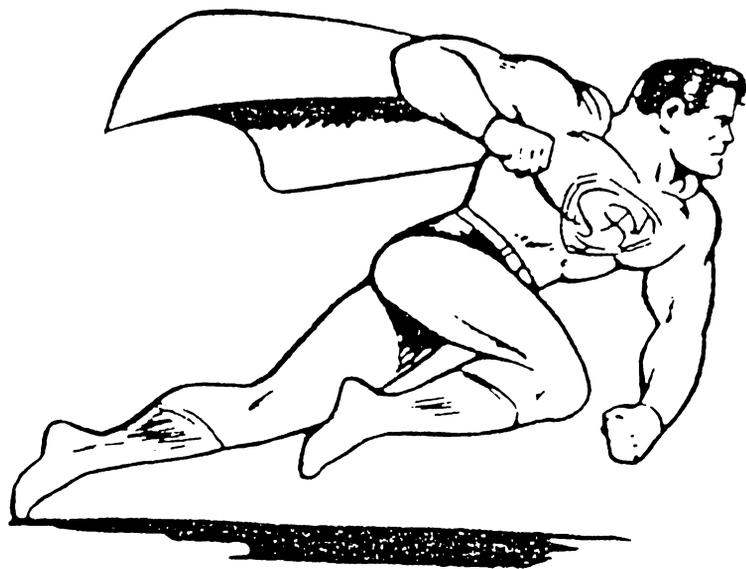
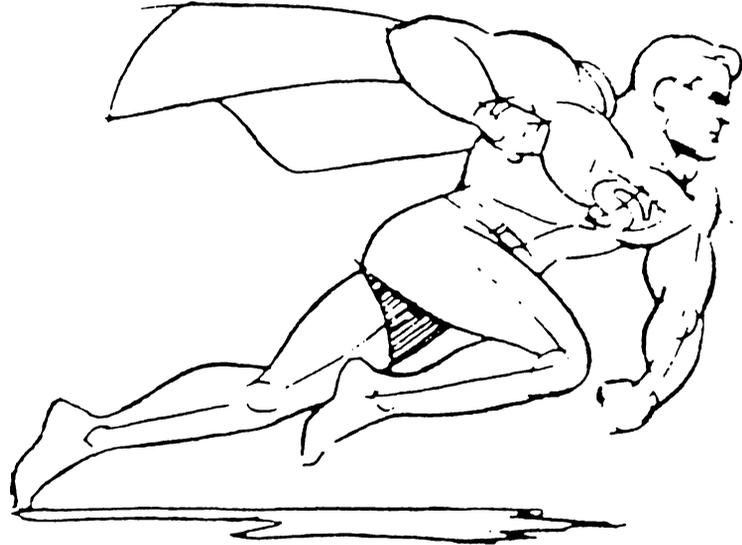
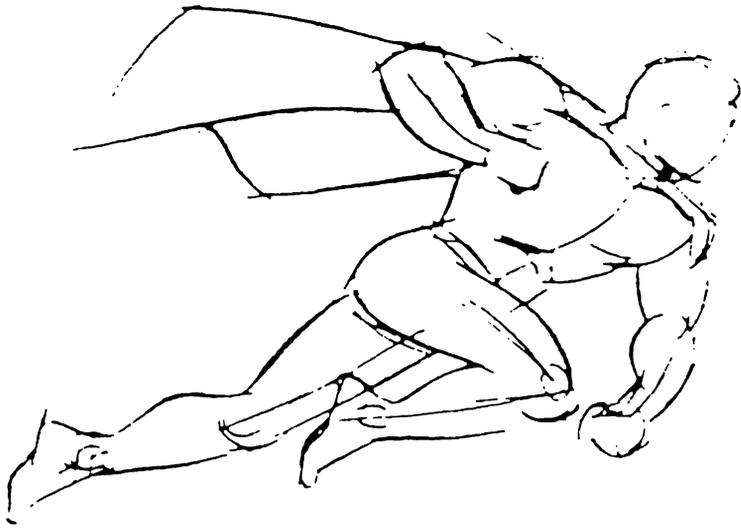


figure 2.2



panel, the character is fixated in the mind of the reader by a new iconic power (McCloud 188).

Once defined in its heroic proportions, the line art style in which the hero is portrayed poses to be an efficient way to preserve the physical features. A host of comics heroes followed Superman including Batman in 1939 which followed the same premise: they were all costumed characters represented by iconic figures which were attached to their character traits. Burne Hogarth, with his Tarzan comics established this approach as a school, as a manifestation of a political apprehension of the human subject, devising ways to construct on the comics page the dynamic figure in action. The teachings of Hogarth in his books were based on foreshortening the figure so that it seemed to leap off the page (fig 2.3). This approach reflected a dynamic, valiant human ideal, which held total control over the events that surrounded him. This school spanned another generation of artists which were to adopt this dynamic heroic ideal.

In the 1960s Jack Kirby's dynamic creations overshadowed their former models of the 1930s. However dynamic they are, Kirby's heroes have a twist to them. The costume which has once acted as invisible flat colors worn on the architectonic figure, is seen in Kirby's art as actual garment bearing wrinkles. Moreover, the facial expressions (fig 2.4)- in contrast to a great deal of mainstream comics

figure 2.3



figure 2.4



heroes of the 60s with relatively stable faces - are given much elasticity by the artist (Ray Wyman jr. qtd. in McLellan E-1). Also the physical features are slightly distorted and the characters look grittier as opposed to the former costumed heroes which were marked by neatness and loyalty to their real life models. Although slight disruptions, these findings point to the very first questioning of the heroic figure as a stable icon. Shaking the sacredness of their ancestors like Superman and Batman, Kirby's heroes pose as the first antiheroes to appear in mainstream comic books. The Fantastic Four, Thor and Silver Surfer might be engaging in action scenes with never-before-seen explosiveness (fig 3.4, 3.5) and accomplishing great feats, but these characters are not immune to internal conflicts. Kirby definitely deviates from the unmistakable idealism of the comics hero established in the 1930s. By slightly distorting the visual representation and parting with the artistic norms Kirby's approach signals the first evidences of a mark of self expression in comics art.

## 2.2. Heterogeneous Representations and the Fragmented Hero

### 2.2.1. The Shifting Cartoon Figure

Cartoons have been recognized as powerful signifiers and traditionally they have served to fix the character attributes of the comics heroes. And these traditional

heroes were seldom underlined by uncertainty or unpredictability. However, in the 1980s creators gained a broader consciousness about the potentialities of their medium. By the recognition of a wide array of visual rendering styles, the cartoon remained a specific case. Ceasing to be the sole style of execution, traditional cartooning or line art was employed with regard to the choice of the artist.

With the emergence of the graphic novel format a variety of approaches took shape during the process of substantial experimentations within the medium. One approach is to regard the house style as neutral. By employing traditional cartooning or a certain house style associated with the comics mainstream, style is simply held constant in such graphic novels like Watchmen, Batman: The Killing Joke, or Give Me Liberty. This way, the iconic cartoon serves a specific purpose, helps achieve a consciously intended effect. Rendered in the house style, the subversiveness of the hero in these graphic novels relies on the expressiveness of the words, the composition of the comics tableau or narrative techniques adopted from literature. Points further to be discussed in Chapter 3. However, since a consciousness is gained, the iconic figure might as well be distorted radically for more expressive effects in questioning the coherence of the traditional comics hero. The cartoon will be deformed to reflect the inner conflicts

of characters. This distortion started in the graphic novels which revised the former comics hero.

In referring back to a cluster of portrayals of Superman ranging from the 1930s to the 1980s we are to observe a character who expresses his heroism, dignity and, integrity through reassuring postures - a mark of less cynical times (fig 2.5). Superman as the model for the traditional comics hero preserved his positive, idealistic qualities and his mental unity. While the dynamic posture codes heroism, the neat, brightly colored stable costume completes the physiognomy reinforcing unity at another level. Visual stability is to reflect mental and moral coherence that is to reassure predictability of the character's further exploits.

In the way to diverging from the linear cartoon Frank Miller's Daredevil: Gang War (1980), Alan Moore's Superman: Whatever Happened to the Man Of Tomorrow?(1986), served as attempts to betray the innocence coded by the cartoon. In their case coherence of the lines contradicts the character traits. When the style is held constant by utilizing traditional cartooning, the postures might be subverted. Our expectations from a familiar cartoon hero are upset when he poses doubtfully or cynically (fig 2.6), contrasting the valiant, forward-leaping character of the memory (fig 2.2).

figure 2.5

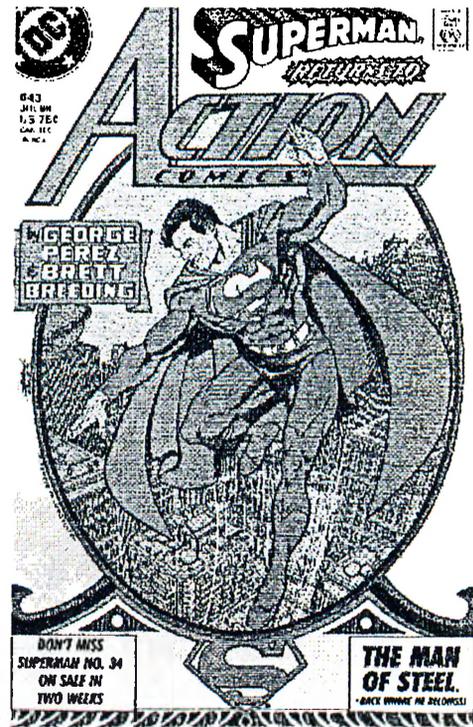
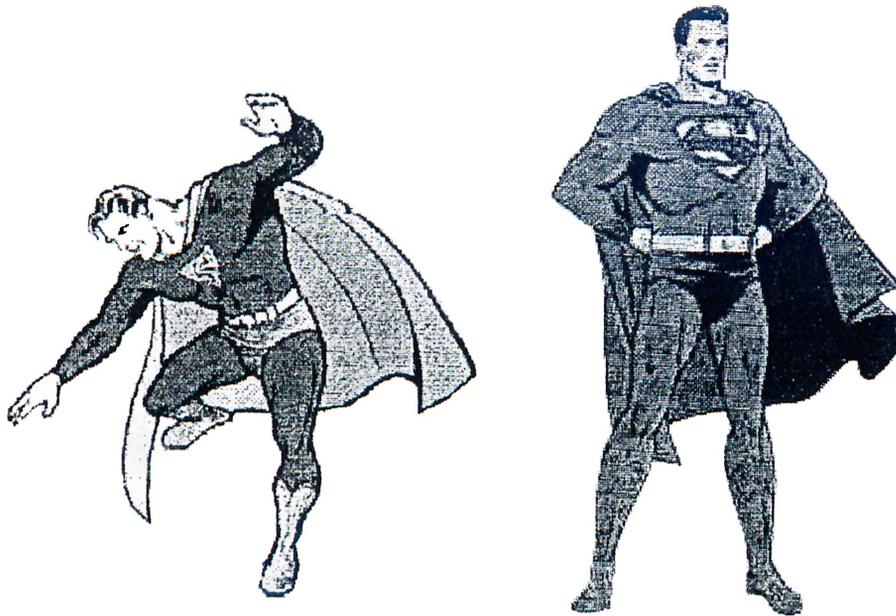


figure 2.6



The radical divergence from the stable iconic figure is initiated in Frank Miller's groundbreaking work Batman: The Dark Knight Returns. This work revises Batman, so that, the mental unity, coherence and moral reassurance of the hero are made suspect. We are introduced with a retired Batman leading life as his alter ego Bruce Wayne, a rich man in his 50s. He is a character on the edge of mental breakdown - suicidal and out-of-control - who is constantly trying to convince himself that although this world that surrounds him might appear chaotic and apocalyptic, there remains chance of recovery. He has to convince himself that the world still makes sense and we can find peaceful ways to cure the ills of the society. His project is to help mentally and physically healing a sworn-criminal, Two Face - a chronic case with dual identities reflected by his partially deformed face. Just as the public thinks he is healed, success achieved by Bruce Wayne and sanity, Two Face/Harvey Dent disappears. When he reappears it is observed that far from being recovered Two Face has completely overcome by his darker self. On this last straw Wayne will don the costume and ramble the rooftops of Gotham City as the Batman. This Batman is no longer the self-righteous, undoubting, valiant hero of the past. An overaged man, he doubts his odds to defeat his foes, he is anxious about his own life, or whether his crusade will worth it. Throughout the book his worries prove him right. Batman loses control, breaks his oath and kills his archenemy the Joker. He is insulted by

teenage gang members and fights his former ally Superman as an attempt to self destruction.

Bruce Wayne/Batman is rendered in a variety of postures and costumes which disrupt his former image. And most importantly the coherence of the line is lost just as Batman cannot decide who he is or the reader cannot decide the identity of the hero. Literary character is supposed to be readable,

as a coherently perceived figure existing, during the reading act, in the imaginative space produced in the reader's mind by the transmission of that figure (the text's coded instructions for perceiving it as a figure) and its reception (the reader's acting upon those instructions to imagine it as a figure)" (Cohan 113).

In Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, the conventional understanding is upset while the characters appear to be clusters of expressions. When we think of Batman or Superman - as they are portrayed in the graphic novel - as representational figures and subjects of consciousness, their identity seems fluid, without distinctive shape. And that fact is graphically witnessed through the discontinuous rendering.

Frank Miller's rendering style is still line art, yet an expressive one. Miller's Batman is a mere caricature of his earlier portrayals. Just as to reflect the hero's inner turmoil and the external feats Miller draws various caricatures of Batman ranging from the valiant and self-

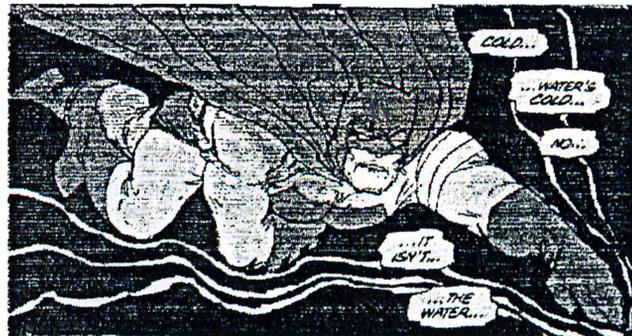
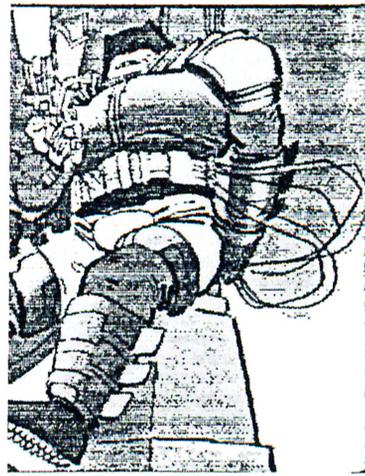
assured to the confused, angry, and out of control. The lines vary from neat to gritty (fig 2.7). There is little coherence in Batman's physical appearance, just as we cannot trace the usual coherence in his character. Batman is really portrayed as a grotesque caricature of his former self when he is fighting with the members of the teenage gang, murdering his archenemy Joker, or during his final confrontation with his long-time friend, former ally Superman.

Superman's portrayal is no different. He has had integrity, self-righteousness, and omnipotence that the readers haven't suspected. However, the Superman we face in Batman: The Dark Knight Returns has turned into a tool of the system, a cowardly government agent who is also in a fight with his personal demons and doubts. He faces a fatal nuclear explosion where he meditates and restores much of his integrity. During this introspection Superman's physical deterioration and recovery is conveyed by the transforming lines of the artist (fig 2.8).

#### 2.2.2. Mixed Media Representations

Within the graphic novel format artists are discovering new, non-linear, more subjective rendering styles that urges the reader to meditate about the uncertain appearance of the hero rather than simply be involved in the stable cartoon.

figure 2.7



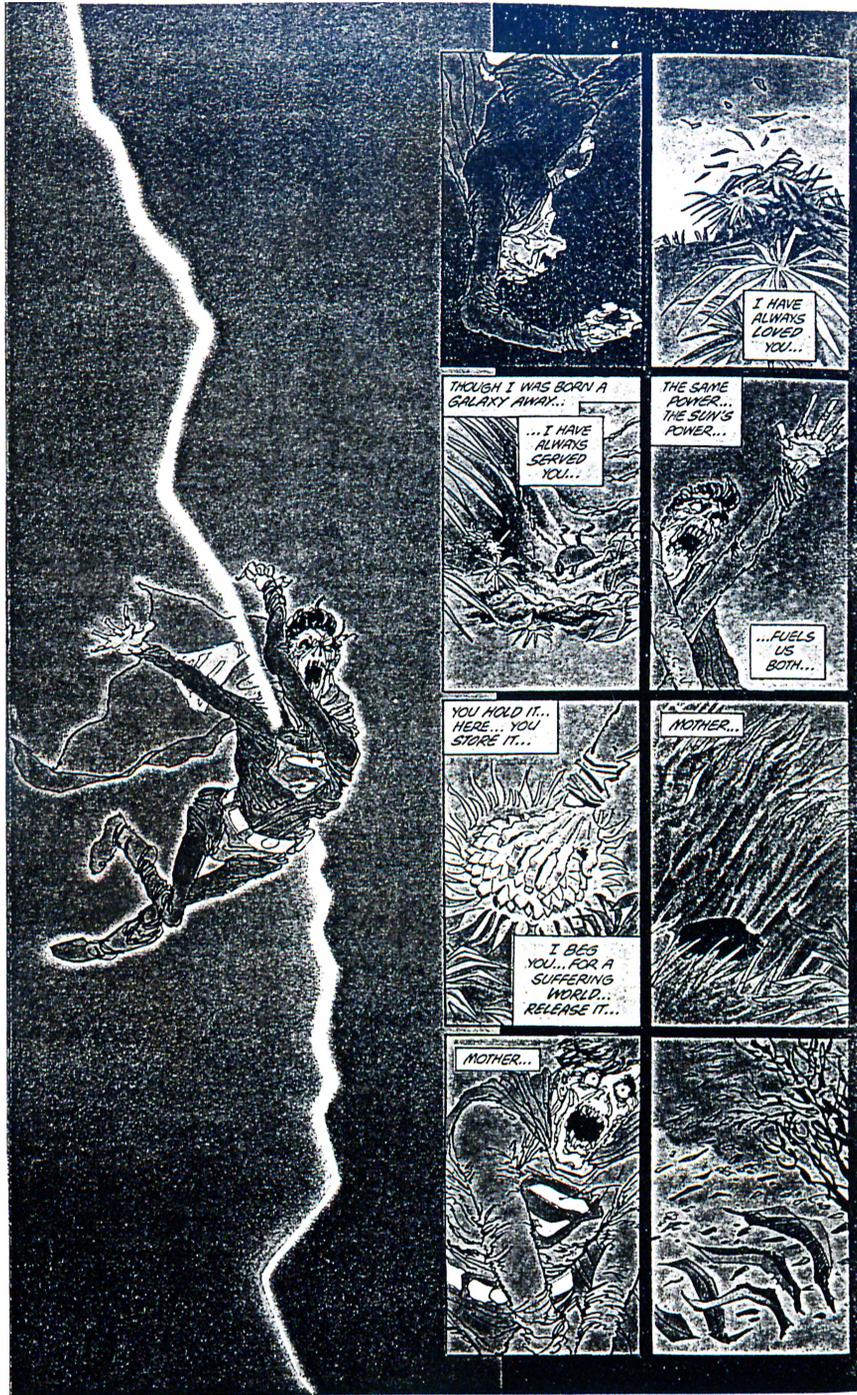


figure 2.8

As stated in the earlier sections, with traditional line art the ideas behind the representation are communicated more directly. The icon as a powerful graphic sign veers closer to language. As suggested by Jacques Bertin, Graphism or graphic signification, constitutes only one form of transcription of the auditory verbal speech, in which speech predefines the organization, meaning and functions of utilized visual signs (qtd. in Saint-Martin 17). In this context, the message of graphic signs is "linked to the illustration of previously fixed sequences of verbal concepts" (17).

However, the graphic novels executed in mixed-media - where the shapes and figures are defined by hue and chroma rather than line - offer new opportunities, such that, with the subjectivity of colors the readers can "recover contact with, deepen, or master their nonverbal [emphasis mine] experiences" (Saint-Martin xiv).

Very first examples of this more radical divergence from the iconic image comes with Bill Sienkiewicz's mixed-media graphic novels Elektra: Assassin and Dardevil: In Love and War each of which appeared in 1986. Having started in the house style popularized by Neil Adams, Sienkiewicz had to unlearn the techniques he had long adopted. Sienkiewicz, just like Frank Miller, started his departure by disrupting

the already established heroes in the Moonknight comics of the 1980. Appearing on the pages of Moonknight 13, the Daredevil character is seen to be rendered in flexible lines (fig 2.9). Moonknight series question the naiveté of conventional storylines, introducing apparent caricatures of the heroes. On a page from Moonknight 13, the comic book cliché of heroes misunderstand each other, throw a fight, make peace, then team up and fight their common foe, is parodied. While the public sound their complaints, the heroes provide lengthy explanations for their mutual misunderstanding (fig. 2.10). The artist in his private space - the sketchbook - openly reveals personal opinions about these icons, while Superman at an instance is mocked by various caricatures (fig 2.11). Later, in the graphic novel Elektra: Assassin it is witnessed that the disparate rendering styles employed upon each page serve to stake the unity or even the presence of the characters. What defines the characters are now not line but hue and chroma.

Dave McKean follows Sienkiewicz with his artwork in Batman: Arkham Asylum and Mr.Punch. Both works are marked by their heterogeneity of imagery. In Arkham Asylum we face with familiar characters Two-Face and Joker. However, we can never make sense of Batman. A clear visual rendering of the hero is avoided. He seems to appear and disappear consequently. While the cartoon figure worked largely to foreground the hero visually, the mixed-media Batman seems

figure 2.9

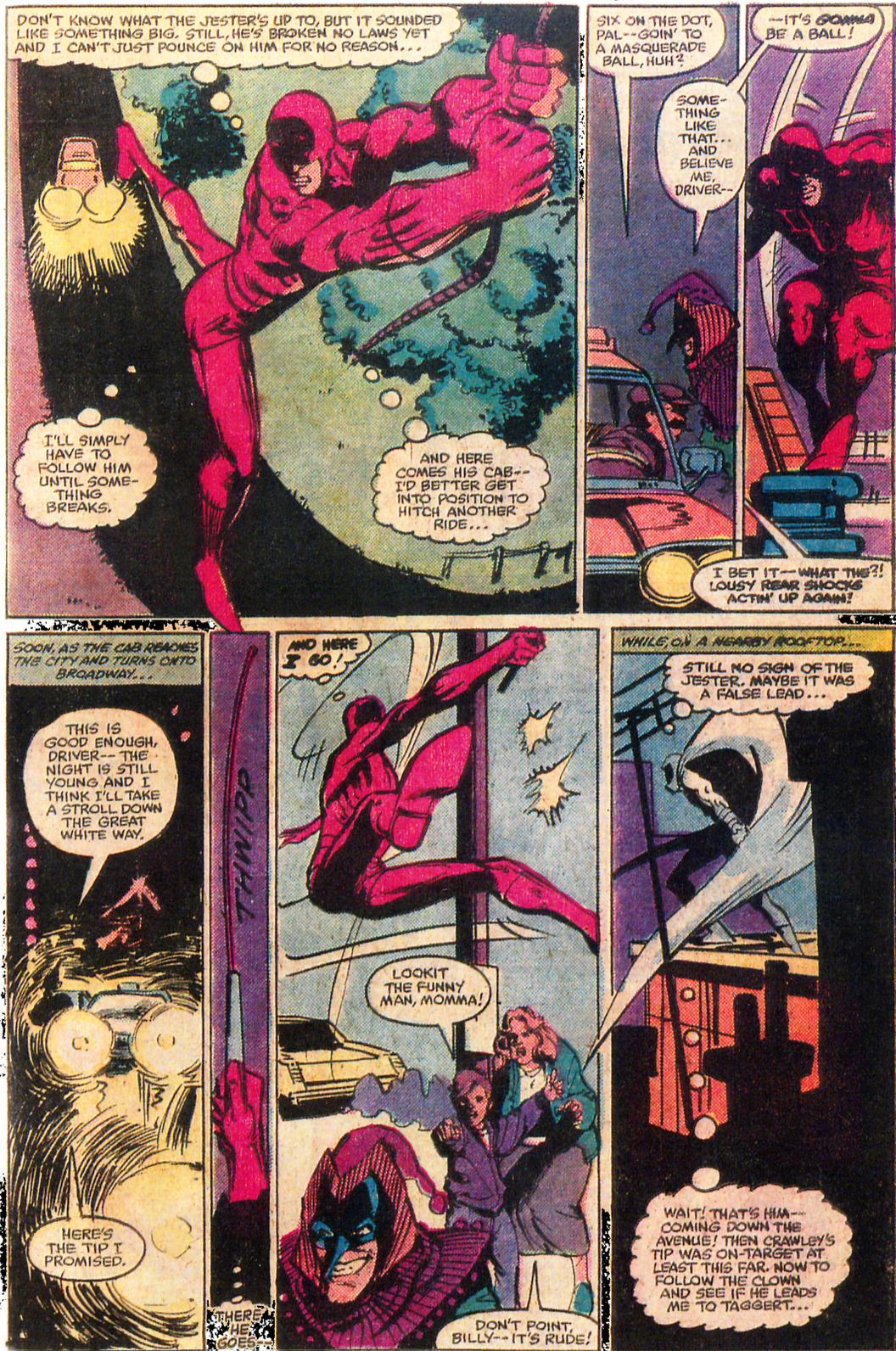


figure 2.10

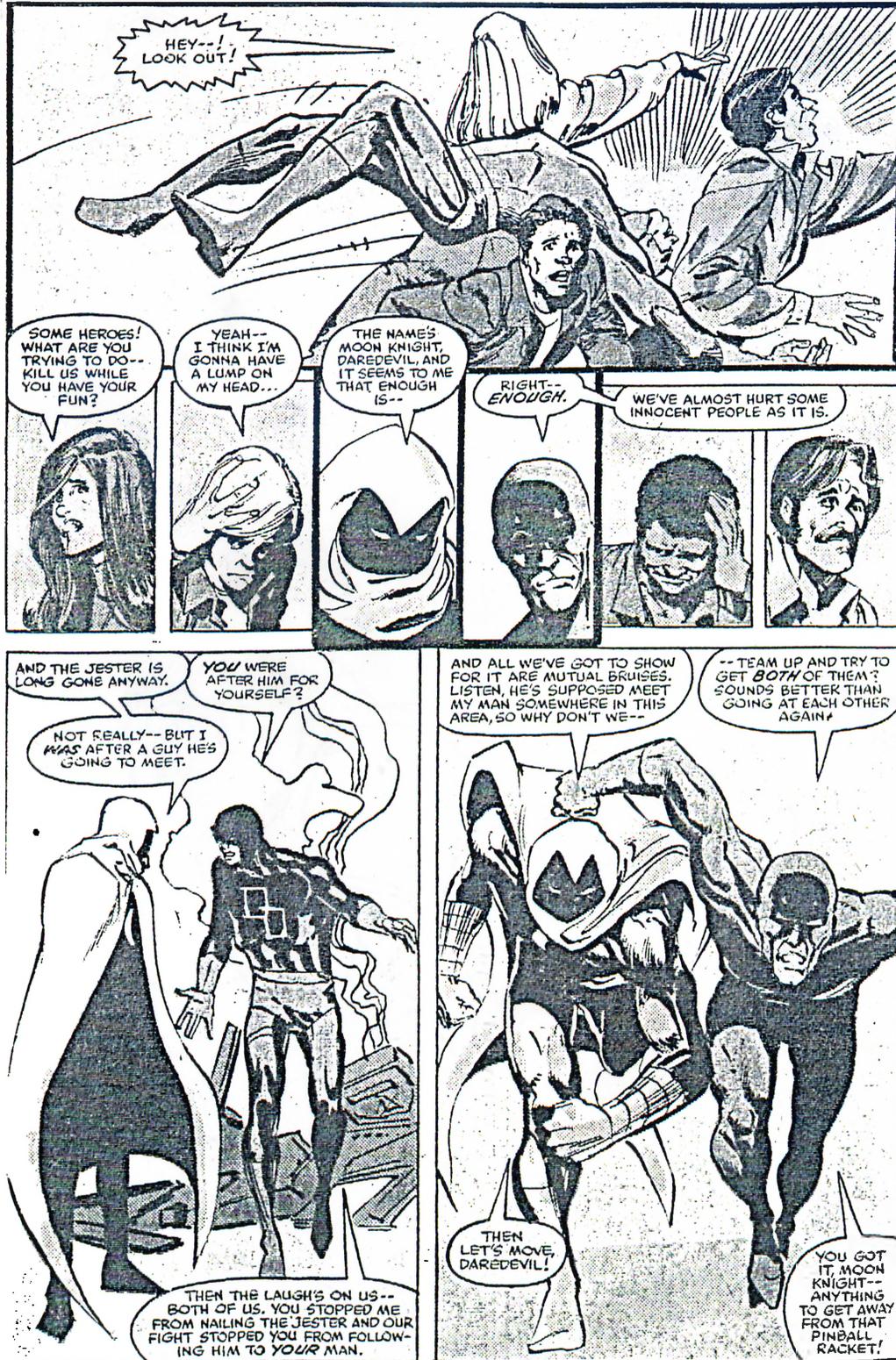


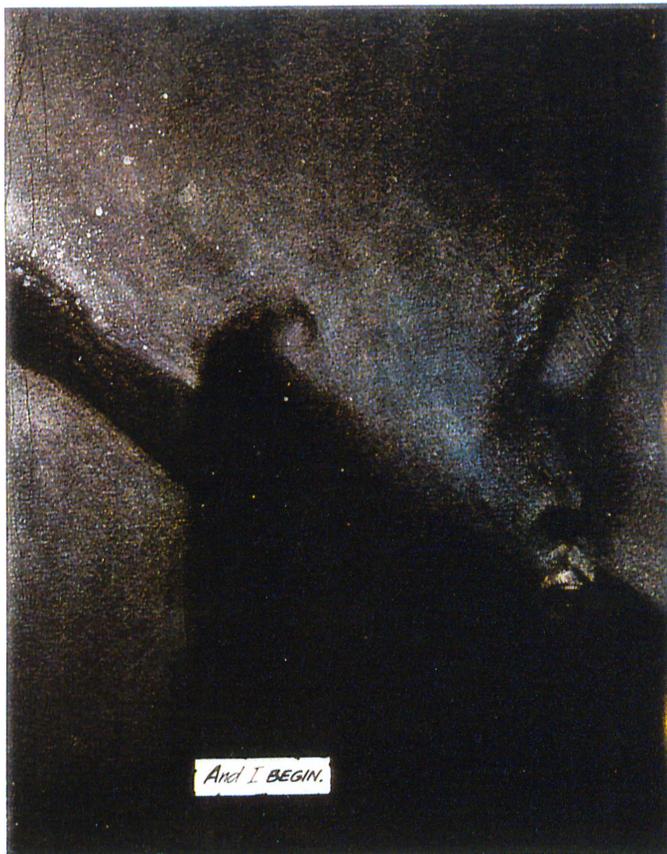
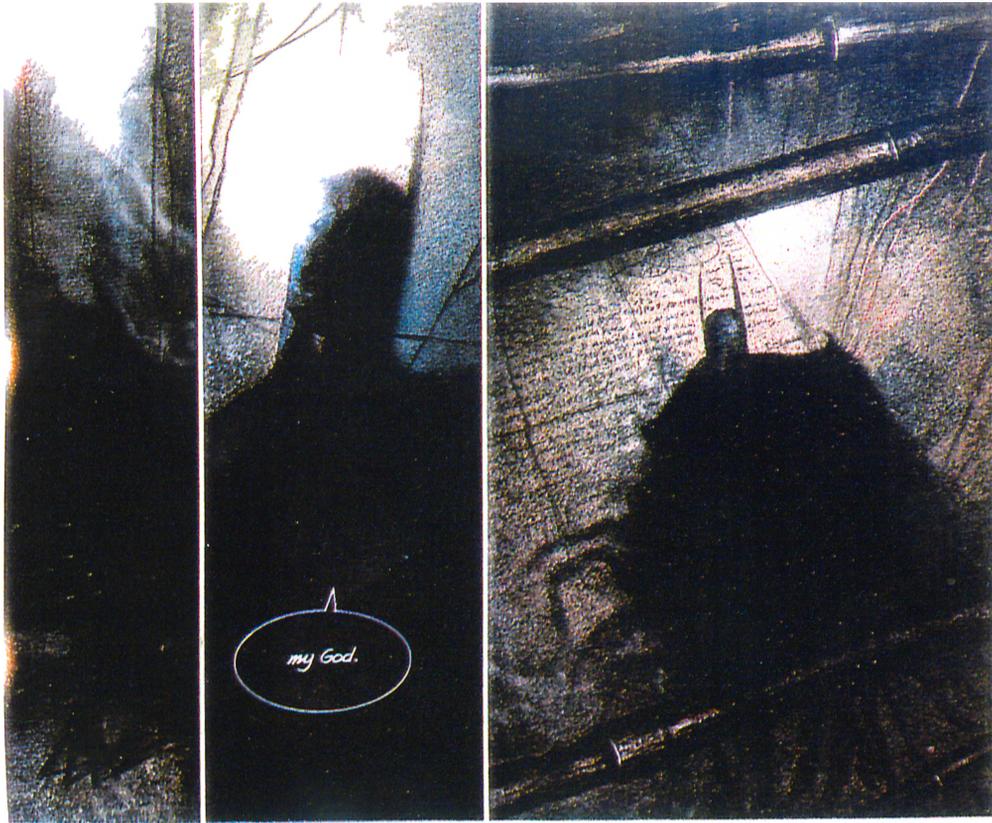
figure 2.11



to fuse with the ground (fig 2.12). He does not dominate the visual world that he is been embedded in. He poses to be a mere observer. His efforts to change the course of the action are useless, just as his wish to rise to the surface. Batman in Batman: Arkham Asylum is helpless, and impotent when contrasted with his former, valiant portrayals or even with the revisionist portrayal in Batman: Dark Knight Returns. This Batman has many dimensions, many faces, many dialects and many states of mind.

Finally, Artist Dave McKean's latter work Mr. Punch recites a childhood memory, in the eyes of the adult. In the memory, pieces are not complete and the heterogeneity of styles that the figure is rendered in reflects this fact. Some parts of the past are blurred. The anxieties of the kid character is reinforced by adoption of many disparate image-making styles. A kid is a fearful character. The world and characters surround him are demonic in proportion and somehow eerie and possess extra qualities in this wondering mind than they actually do. It is a mysterious world. These concepts are mentioned by a certain page from Mr. Punch, where the kid's grandfather shakes him in the air yelling jokingly, "shall I throw you in, eh? Shall I throw you in the water?". As a response writer Gaiman recites within perspective of the kid. "Adults are threatening creatures" reads the caption. The accompanying illustration amplifies

figure 2.12



this idea. The kid is rendered in disparate styles, as fragments scattered on the panels (fig 2.13).

The diversity of the visual styles in which the figure has been rendered in these graphic novels proposes substantial meditation, so that, the character is apprehended through a cluster of images laid before the reader.

figure 2.13



## CHAPTER 3

### SITUATING THE FIGURE: GRAPHIC AND NARRATIVE COMPOSITION IN GRAPHIC NOVEL

#### 3.1 Mimicking Cinema: Traditional Comics and the Film Storyboard

A discussion of the mechanics of the traditional comics requires a focus on the initial experiments conducted within the medium. As noted earlier in the introduction chapter, it was Rodolphe Topffer the Swiss educator who in the early 1800s began examining the possibilities of telling stories by composing them in sequence in the sense that would lead to the traditional comics. He employed cartooning and panel borders, in his light satiric picture stories which featured the first interdependent combination of words and pictures (McCloud 17). British caricature magazines followed the lead and at the turn of the century upon the pages of American newspapers were born the first comic strips.

Comics pioneer Topffer did not mimic cinematic techniques but anticipated them. However, once cinema emerged and was established as a medium, comics seemed appropriations. The desire to animate the pictures lead former comics creator Winsor McKay to pursue his experiments in the field of film. McKay became one of the forefathers of the animated cartoon. Comics stemming from the pursuit of representing motion depended on to show what happens next. This intention is more in tune with the mechanics of cinema since the film can hide and show. The frames projected on a screen are replaced by consecutive ones while the comics panels do not disappear in order to be succeeded. Rather they appear simultaneously on the same plane. As in the case of an early comic strip like Winsor McKay's "Foolish Philippe" (fig 3.1) the uniformly sized panels are aligned consecutively on the two dimensional plane of the page. Through a preconceived camera eye it is observed that while the scene is fixed, the characters change their places panel after panel. This composition relies on the ability of the reader to tie together the panels by viewing them from left-to-right and top-to-bottom so as to achieve the effect of motion. The eyes move along the sequence of panels in wonder to see what happens next. However, the panel on the top left corner happens to appear simultaneously with the panel on the bottom right. No law - other than the acquired practice of reading print narratives - will prevent the reader to peek

**PHURIOUS PHINISH OF PHOOLISH PHILIPES PHUNNY PHROLICS**  
(COPYRIGHT, 1964 BY THE NEW YORK HERALD CO.)

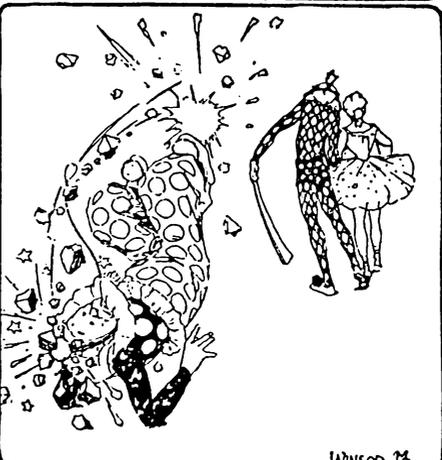
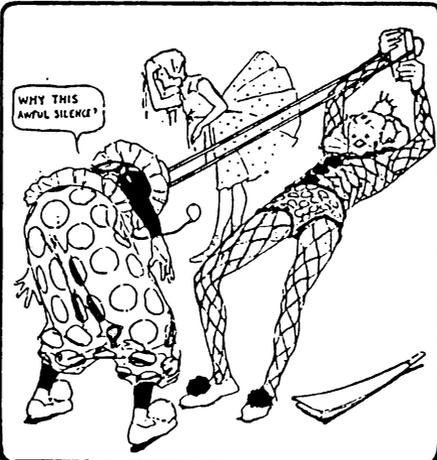


Figure 3.1

at the bottom right panel first, and the comics' premise that relies on anticipation is made virtually irrelevant.

For Winsor McKay, comics panels which acted like keyframes have provided the basis for his pioneering experiments in the field of the animated cartoon. The earlier strips were to serve as storyboards to plan film production. As defined in Bordwell and Thompson's Film Art these "comic-strip like drawings of individual shots or phases of shots with descriptions written below each drawing" (497) are utilized in visualizing the scenes. Mostly, storyboards are required in choreographing action sequences (fig 3.2). Comic strips composed of uniform panels contested cinema on their own terms.

In the midway to abandoning the practice of portraying linear temporal flow which depended on preserving a sense of wonder - along with the disadvantage of juxtaposed consecutive images - the creators starting in the 1930s began choreographing dynamic action sequences (fig 3.3). And more explosive action was provided by the comics launched in the 1960s by writer Stan Lee and artist Jack Kirby through Marvel publications.

Through the method labeled as the Marvel way, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby have largely adopted the techniques of cinema and their work stand out as dynamic film storyboards. Lee's



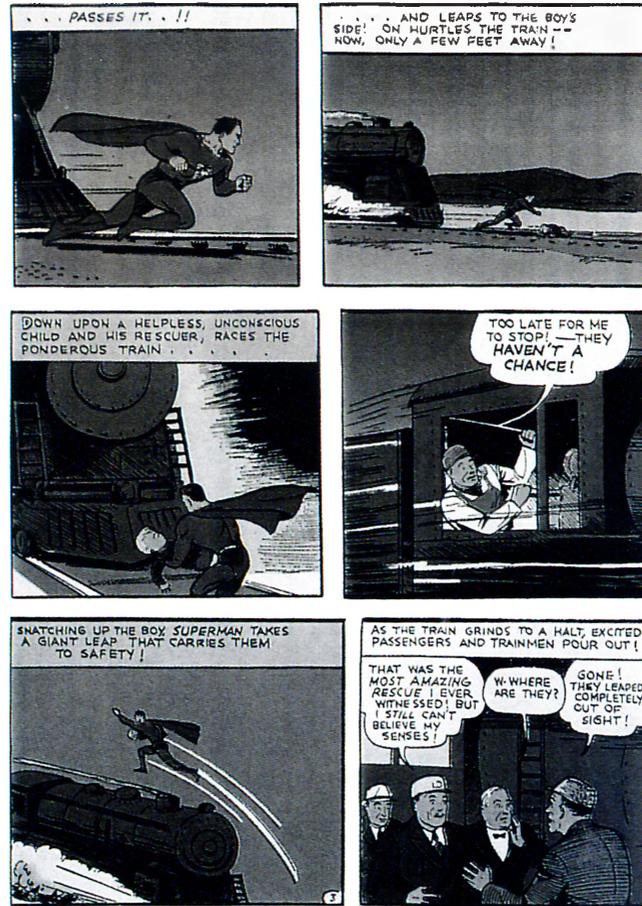
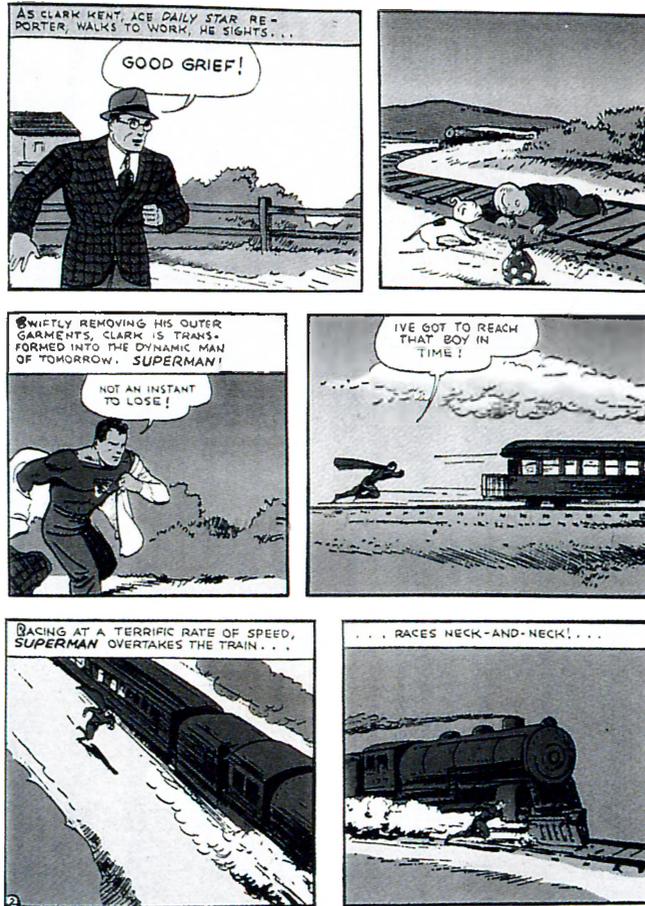


Figure 3.3

understanding of the comics as a medium is best manifested in How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way, his instructive work on how he conceives comics making. Lee introduces the cinematic techniques - the close-up, medium, long and panoramic long-shot, bird's eye view, worm's eye view, et al. - as vital elements to the Marvel way of comics making. Marvel approach - in the same vein with the tradition - largely denies the graphic elements in defining the existence of comics, and these elements are rather considered as given, natural or secondary. The tools of picture making like form, perspective, and composition are considered rather as tools to reproduce the effect of cinema on the comics page. When dealing with form, Lee professes that their intention is to "make a reader feel as if he can just reach out and touch it" (Lee 19). The urge is toward a more realistic representation of three-dimensional objects on the two-dimensions of the picture plane when Lee asserts that "one of the main things that can ruin a drawing is the appearance of flatness [emphasis mine]" (Lee 20). The way Lee takes it, perspective is vitally necessary in making a scene look accurate, "in making things appear to be correctly placed in the foreground, background, and all the places in between" (Lee 29). With composition, what is emphasized is the arrangement within a single panel. How these panels are brought together is almost ignored and reduced to putting frames back to back in storyboard fashion with no regard to the significance of co-presence of these

on the same page. So, these panels will pretend to be appearing and disappearing before the eye of the reader as film frames would and the action will flow. This within-panel composition functions on the premise that dominant forms will be the ones that are central to the narrative action. And this scheme will be emphasized by grouping together those elements so as to form certain abstract patterns or prime shapes beyond the surface of the panel, unifying the picture. The crucial element that combines the Marvel panels is the camera angle. As in film, a linear narrative flow will be attained by devising certain camera angles to the consecutive panels "just as a movie director can arrange his camera shots to suit his own taste" (Lee 116). In the Marvel way, still, inert pictures will ruin the narration. When such a situation is demonstrated comparatively in How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way, one conceives that Marvel approach to comics making heavily relies on the dynamic realistic action depicted within the panels aided by the exclamation of diverse camera angles to add some more explosiveness (fig 3.5). We are to observe that while the set of still-looking, vertical drawings tells the story well enough, they are as Lee asserts and we have to agree, "lacking in heroism, in raw drama, in sheer excitement" (fig 3.4). The stories cannot be immune to this formal approach to storytelling. Although Marvel characters deviate from the unmistakable self-righteousness of the

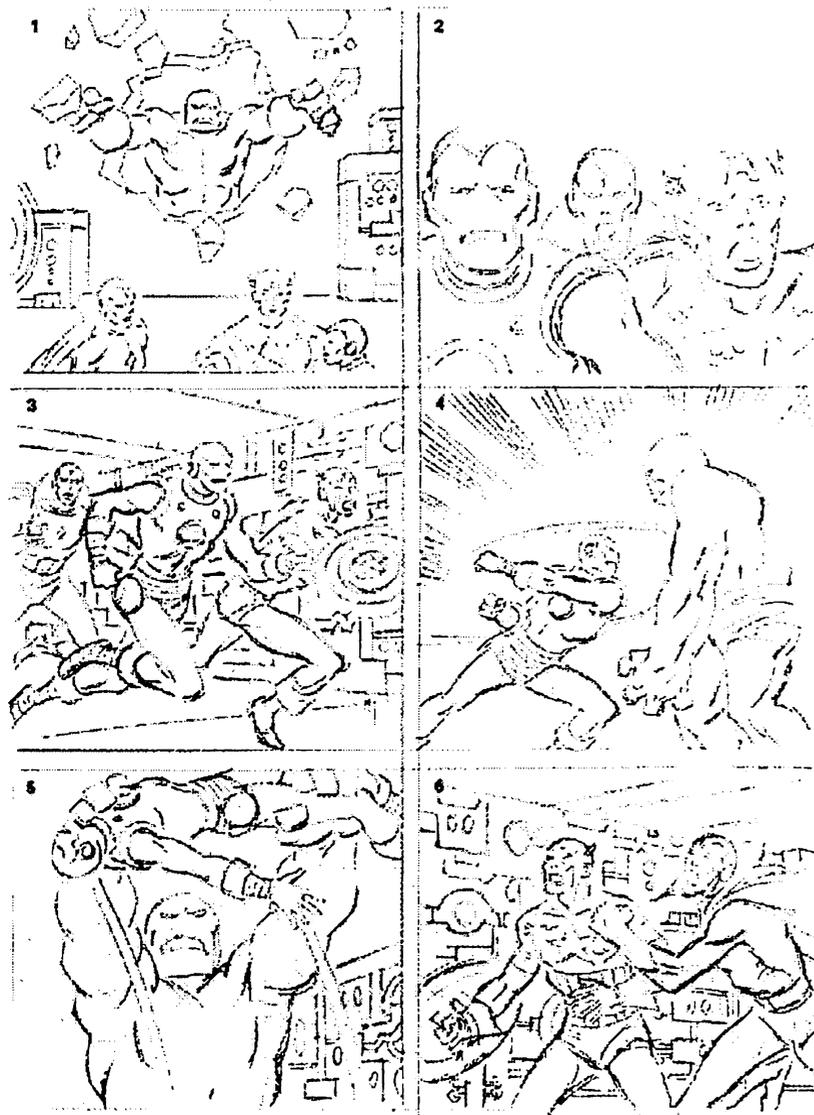


figure 3.4



figure 3.5

former costumed icons, they still largely carry out adventure stories full of dramatized action.

If comics were to simply serve as storyboards their case would be obsolete. Comics were to recognize the significance of the size and shape of the panels as unique narrative devices. In a sequence taken from Fantastic Four Jack Kirby employs a splash page (fig 3.6) to suit the action depicted. A sense for fluid action prevails the mainstream comic book which in Kirby's case owes to a background in animation. Most frequent pattern witnessed in these comics are action-to-action transitions between panels (fig 3.7). Thus the form still preserves the wonder to see what happens next.

What is maintained by these traditional comics is a sense of unity of action. It will require a broader recognition that comics come to terms with the one quality inherent to them: The panels actually appear simultaneously on the same plane. And rather than resisting this fact, graphic novels will utilize the spatial potential of the page.

## 3.2 Spatiality and the Composition of the Graphic Novel

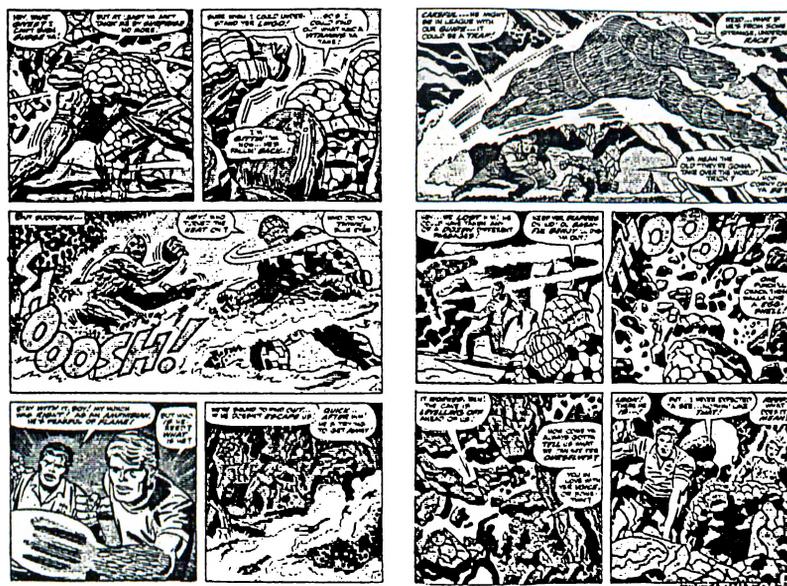
### 3.2.1 Spatiality and the Graphic Novel Tableau

Whereas the traditional comics were marked by their forward flowing action, the contemporary graphic novel devises

figure 3.6



figure 3.7



techniques to promote the acts of comparing, relating, reviewing, and a backwards movement to accompany the forward one, which in turn activates the potentials of the comics page.

#### 3.2.1.1. Basic Plane and the Tableau of the Graphic Novel

As noted in the previous section the mechanics of comics radically diverge from that of cinema by virtue of spatiality. In film, a frame is sequentially replaced with another, but the comics panels are simultaneously co-present on the page. This aspect is de-emphasized by the chronological sequence assigned to the traditional comics page. The preceding images do not disappear but are pushed back by the forward thrust of the narrative. The consistency of the size and arrangement of the images were to further ease this flow. The panel is manifestly the narrative unit of the traditional comics while the action depicted within the autonomous panel is to be the focus of attention. Panel borders and the gutter pretended to be neutrals in the narration which silently served to contain and part the forward flowing action. These assumptions are parodied in Matt Feazall's strip "The Incredible Mr. Spot" which disrupts the forward flow and recognizes the juxtaposition of elements, in a way utilizing the spatial potential of the page (fig 3.8).

figure 3.8



Thus, when comics gain a consciousness of their two dimensional picture plane, the narrative unit ceases to be the autonomous panel. Spatiality brings about to regard the mechanics of the comics page at the nucleic level of its basic plane which is a more global understanding of the field of inscription of pictorial images. The term defines, "a material plane which preexists any attempt at visual representation...upon which artistic projection is inscribed" (Saint-Martin 77).

The revisioning of the comics page follows that, by utilizing the mechanics of its spatial qualities, the narrative unit of the graphic novel becomes the entire page or the two page spread, that is, the tableau. When the co-presence of the panels are intensified, the panel border or the gutter are no longer neutral to the narration but are integrated to the mechanics of the page. The end result is usually a narration that proceeds syntagmatically across and down the page, but also enables a paradigmatic reading of mutual relationships among images on the same page or adjacent pages. Thus, the tableau moves the plot forward but offers alternative paths for the eye to wander in making sense of the overall pattern of fragmentary images.

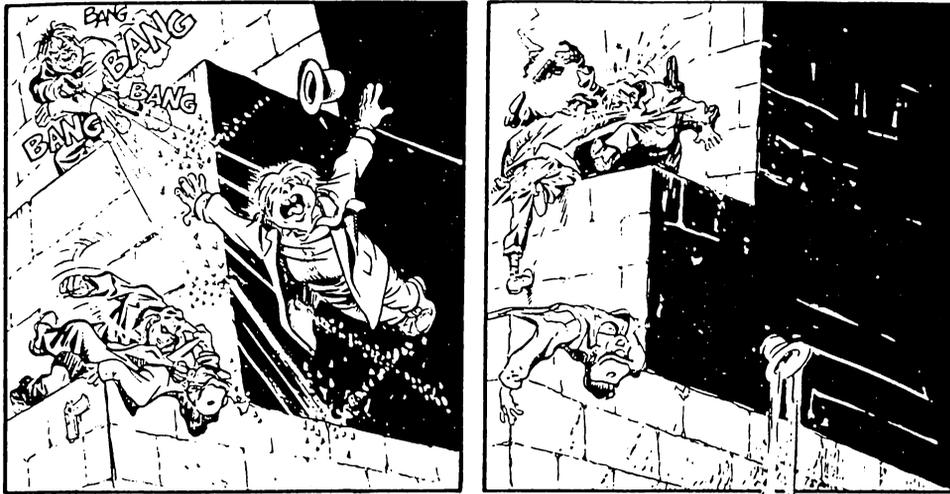
Will Eisner in his innovative 1940s comics The Spirit, was to pioneer the methods to dynamize the page to be regarded as a tableau. In a page of "The Story of Gerhard Snobble"

dated September 5, 1948 it is observed that the eye is forced to follow a path in accordance with the diagram devised by the artist. The eyes follow the path of the falling man bound to the gravitational force, then bounce back with the rise of his soul to the sky (fig 3.9).

Similarly, in a certain tableau of Matt Wagner's Batman: Faces the page is dynamized by the conscious composition of its elements. Captions, speech balloons, panel sizes and shapes are orchestrated in order to popularize an act of reception which is based on relating these elements. Two different views of the same scene are juxtaposed. If read in the conventional manner the center matrix of panels makes no sense. Also, on the surrounding jogging track the action flows in the counter-clockwise direction so as to upset an attempt to follow a more familiar path. Thus the reader has to discover a syntax by a relational act. Although there seems to be a suggested path of reading the tableau, it is not strictly the only one (fig 3.10).

Through the graphic novel which amplifies audience participation by sporting interpretation over simple involvement in predisposed linear graphic paths inscribed on the page, the ambiguity of the message and the decisiveness of both parties are emphasized.

figure 3.9

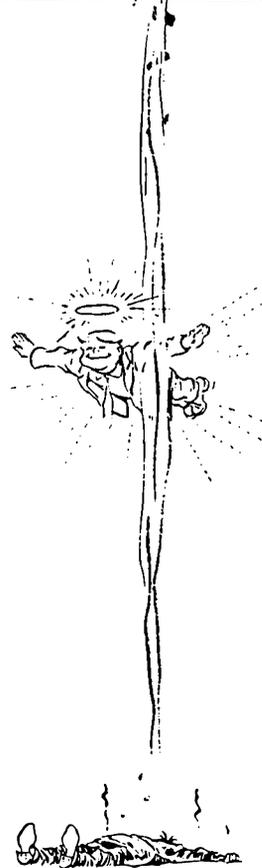


**AND SO...** LIFELESS...  
GERHARD SHNOBBLE FLUTTERED  
EARTHWARD.

**BUT DO NOT WEEP  
FOR SHNOBBLE...**

**RATHER SHED A TEAR  
FOR ALL MANKIND...**

**FOR NOT ONE PERSON IN THE  
ENTIRE CROWD THAT WATCHED  
HIS BODY BEING CARTED AWAY...KNEW  
OR EVEN SUSPECTED THAT  
ON THIS DAY GERHARD SHNOBBLE  
HAD FLOWN.**





### 3.2.1.2 Unification within Tableau

There are two kinds of basic relational activities embedded in the mechanics of comics: Transitions between panels and the combinations of words to pictures. The recognition of spatiality is marked by the construction of reading paths other than the typical left-to-right top-to-bottom. The disruption of chronological flow is attained by composing tableaus which offer reading paths ranging from the predisposed nonlinear to the ones which do not utilize predisposed paths at all. This notion is to be illustrated with the analysis of representative graphic novel tableaus.

Frank Miller's seminal work Batman: The Dark Knight Returns offers the very first comics pages which truly dynamize the unit in order to be apprehended as organic tableaus. The two page unit at the end of book 1 sets out to resolve the conflict between Batman and Two-Face, but rather turns out to reveal permanent enigmas about both characters (fig 3.11). The page spread serves as the overall tableau. The composition of the cluster of 8 panels on the left page generate a relational pattern with those 8 on the right, so as to reinforce their juxtaposition as pairs. The upper and lower horizontal panels stretch to form continuous strips so that the two pages are graphically unified. The 8 panel matrix on the right page is where various relational paths



are activated. In a truly meditational act, Batman's inner dichotomy is reflected by Two-face's dual self. The lack of chronological order on this 8 panel matrix is to justify the spatial quality inherent in the tableau which makes sense by relating the paradigms, rather than by following a linear succession. Forcing the reader to cycle between the panels the narrative seems to have achieved to suspend time.

Captions and panels may come together in such ways to dynamize the page. In the case of the opening page of Watchmen where captions and panels seem to be conceptually isolated, the word-picture combination on the bottom horizontal panel sends the reader back to the one on the top left (fig 3.12). Similarly, in a certain tableau of Neil Gaiman's semi-autobiographical Mr.Punch, a backwards movement is triggered (fig 3.13). The author recites from memory, that his grandfather owned an amusement arcade on the sea-front, while the caption above is supplemented by the illustration. The succeeding panel shifts to a scenery from a different perspective depicting a different setting. However, Gaiman had realized his mistake and the new caption reads, "no, I'm being imprecise. It wasn't on sea-front. It was just far enough away from the sea-front to be complete commercial failure". Immediately after this confession the reader is urged to refer above and relate the two panels. By the dynamic tableau, the uncertainty of the memory images are demonstrated graphically. Being betrayed by memory, the

figure 3.12

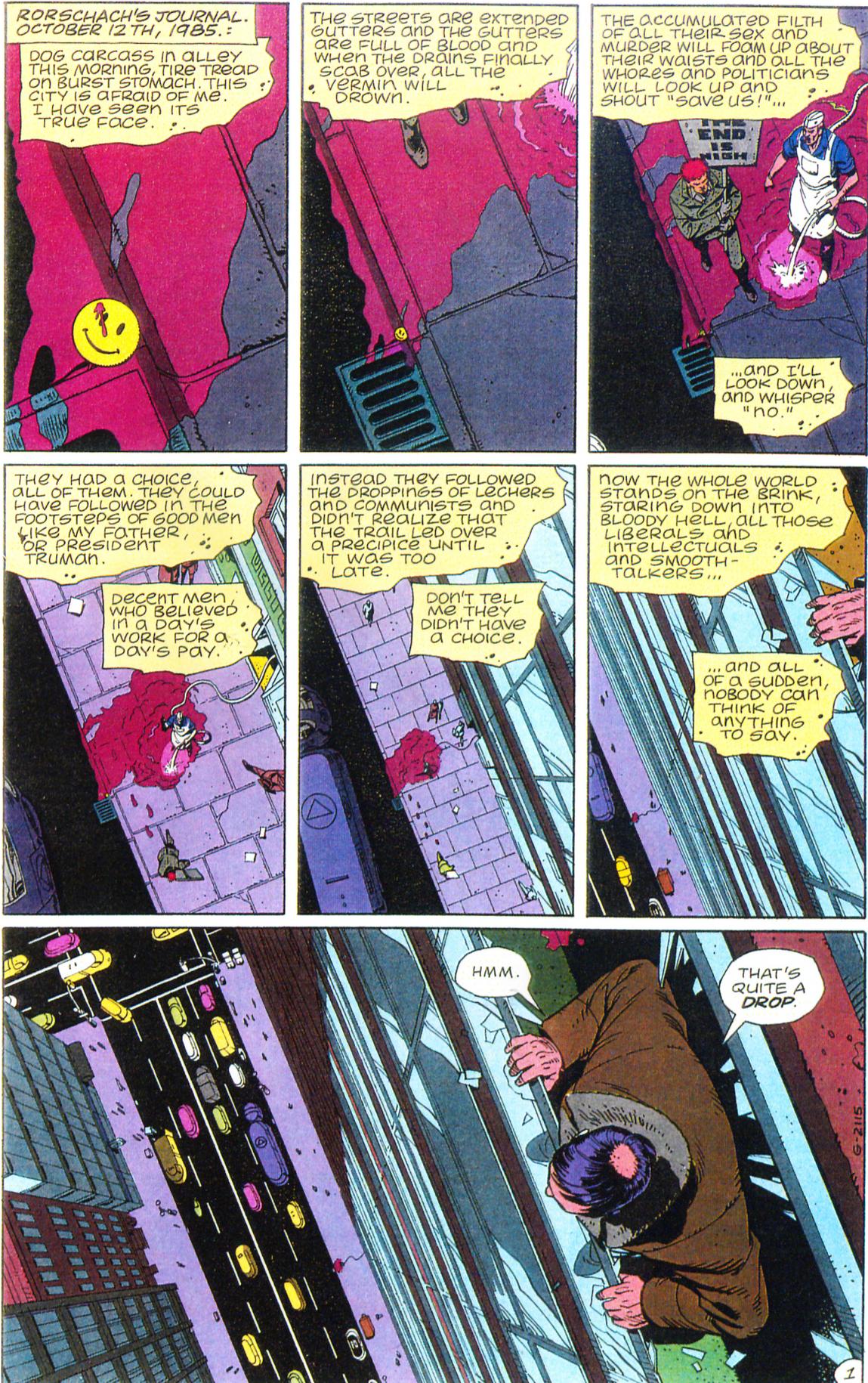
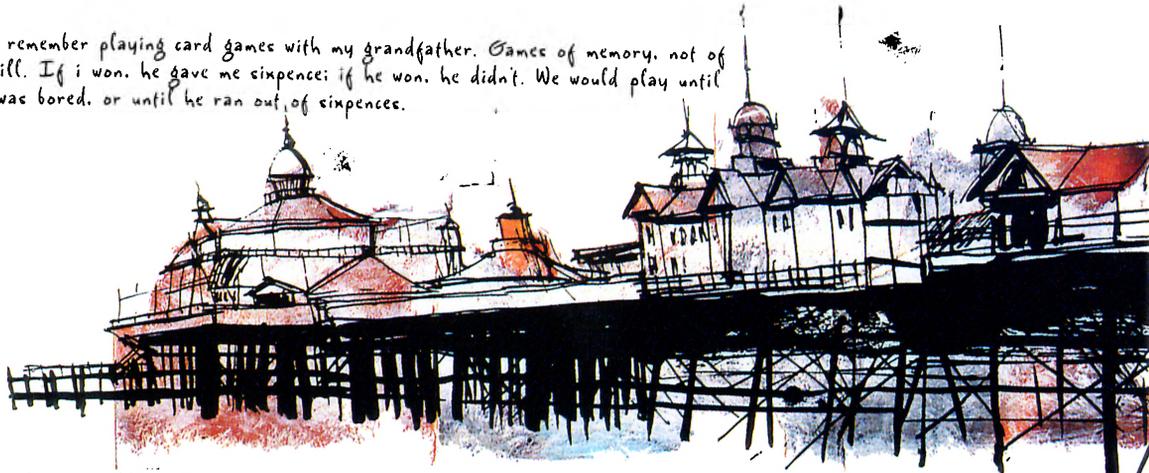
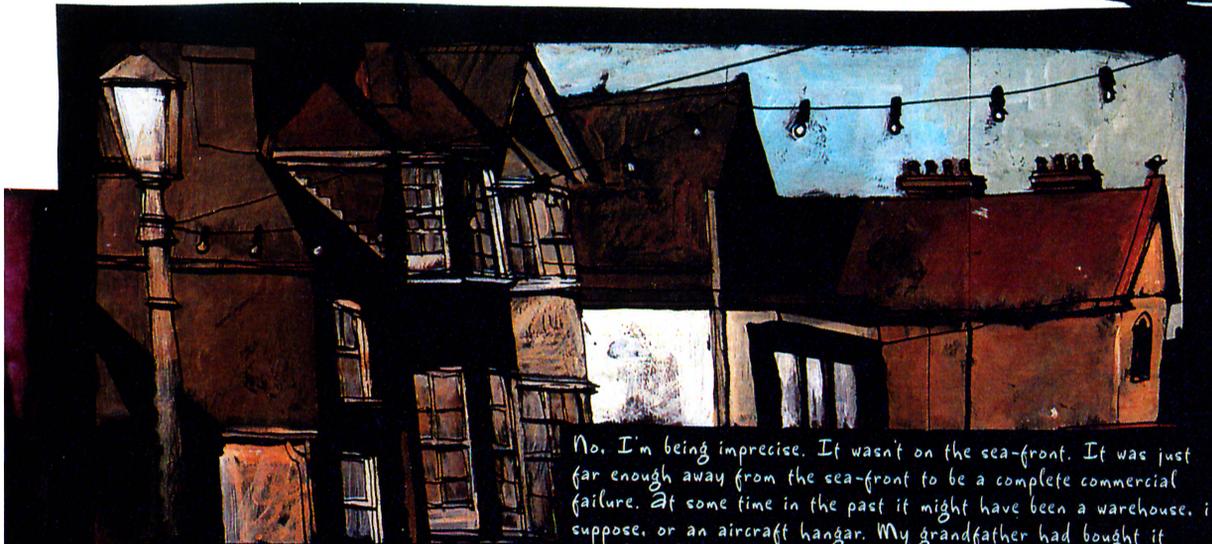


figure 3.13

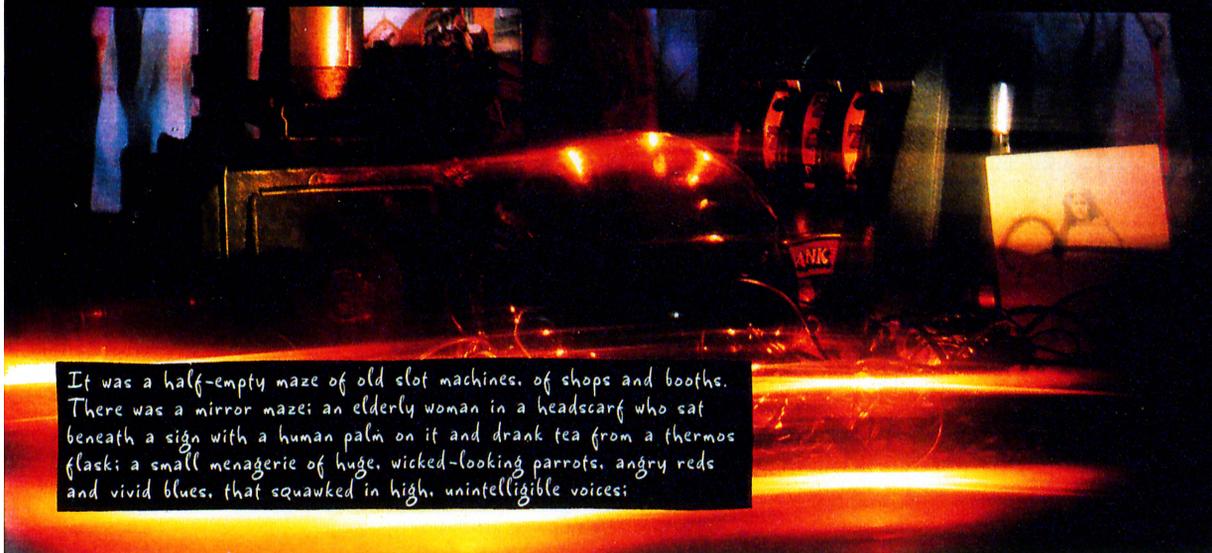
I remember playing card games with my grandfather. Games of memory, not of skill. If i won, he gave me sixpences; if he won, he didn't. We would play until i was bored, or until he ran out of sixpences.



He had sold his grocery chain, and now only had a small amusement arcade on the sea-front.



No, I'm being imprecise. It wasn't on the sea-front. It was just far enough away from the sea-front to be a complete commercial failure. At some time in the past it might have been a warehouse, i suppose, or an aircraft hangar. My grandfather had bought it cheaply and turned it into an inferior copy of the local pier.



It was a half-empty maze of old slot machines, of shops and booths. There was a mirror maze; an elderly woman in a headscarf who sat beneath a sign with a human palm on it and drank tea from a thermos flask; a small menagerie of huge, wicked-looking parrots, angry reds and vivid blues, that squawked in high, unintelligible voices;

author has violated the objectivity of the accompanying illustrations, revealing the arbitrariness of them. The accident has exposed the process of production.

The graphic novel Superman: Speeding Bullets offers pages that upset the notion of predisposed narrative succession.

A representative tableau is the one where the protagonist is arrested in a disturbing moment of introspection.

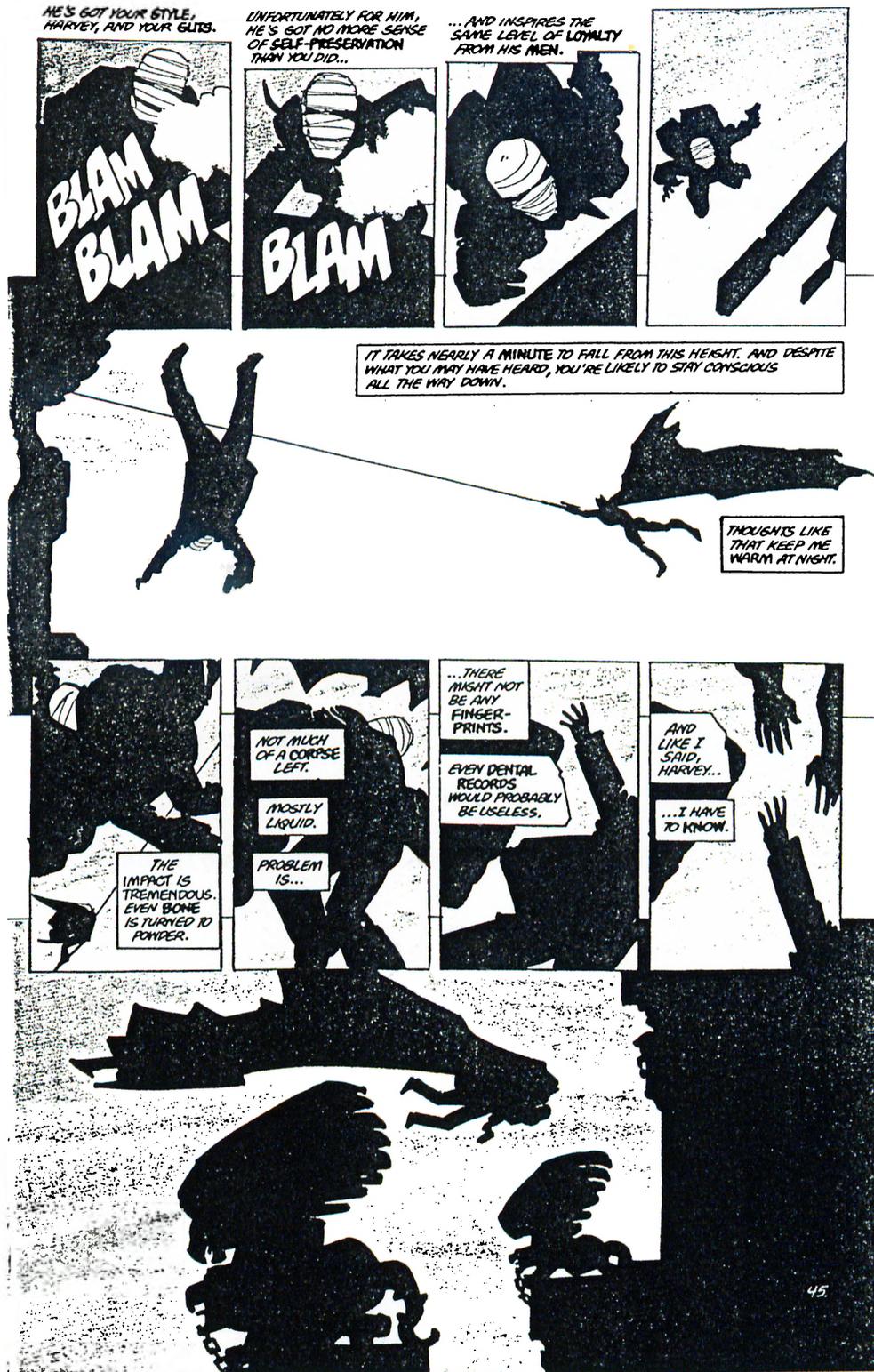
Retrospective images of murders in the city reminiscent of the deaths of his parents haunt him while he is graphically fragmented between the chessboard pattern of the tableau which requires the compositional act of the reader (fig 3.14).

Another representative tableau appears in Batman: The Dark Knight Returns where Batman rescues Two-Face from fall - activates the relational potential between the captions and panels. This one appears to be a cinematic tableau that relies on the mutual dependence of words and pictures. Without words there is no sense: The abstract silhouettes do not tell much in their solitude. Without the pictures there, too, is no meaning since the captions do not really describe what is going on either. In these scenes, it is hard to understand who acts how. So these panels pose themselves as an overall tableau rather than forward flowing cinematic action (fig 3.15).

figure 3.14



figure 3.15



As a further instance of a spatial tableau, the two page spread from Batman: Arkham Asylum is manifestly present to reject any sort of a continuous path of reading. It is the tableau where the reader is introduced to the inside of an asylum (fig 3.16). A total puzzle is introduced where the words independently float over the overall collage of disparate visual imagery. Abstract patterns are to stimulate subjective experiences, inherent in the disorderliness of the verbal concepts in the subconscious. The transgression of the words and pictures and their isolation with one another reinforces that chaotic tableau.

The level of subjectivity that underscores the portrayal of abstract mental images are challenged in Voodoo Child, where the tableau intends to mediate nonverbal experiences like the meditation of a psychedelic rock guitarist with musical stimulation. Here the colors are utilized to evoke sensation rather than providing distinct verbal company (fig 3.17).

### 3.2.2 The Theory of Spatial Form and the Graphic Novel

Paradigms introduced within the mechanizing tableau help disrupting chronological flow, slowing the forward pace of the narrative. However, in contemporary graphic novels the compositional act of the reader is encouraged on a more global level by the adoption of narrative strategies devised



figure 3.17



by writers of fiction which are brought under the theory of spatial form by literary critic Joseph Frank.

### 3.2.2.1 Disruption of Narrative Flow and Maintenance of Thematic Coherence

While temporal arts like music, dance, novel, and cinema are based on consecutiveness in time and are irreversible in essence, the spatial arts such as painting, sculpture, and architecture are based on co-existence in space (Kestner 102). With their extra-medial effects spatial arts convey the illusion of succession, temporal arts - the illusion of simultaneity (103).

What the concept of spatial form does, as submitted by Joseph Frank, "is to call attention to the departures from pure temporality, from pure causal/temporal sequence", so as to force the reader "consider the novel as a whole in a moment of time" (qtd. in Smitten 20). In the case of literary fiction a variety of works attempt to undermine the inherent consecutiveness of language, forcing the reader to perceive the elements of the work not as unrolling in time but as juxtaposed in space. In the novel, this undermining is achieved primarily by the suppression of causal/temporal connectives "those words and word groups by which a literary work is tied to external reality and the tradition of mimesis" (Smitten 17). The suppression of these connectives

alters the whole character of the literary work and forces the reader to perceive it in a new, unconventional way. The reader's new task involves two aspects, as suggested by Joseph Frank:

(1) The reader faces a puzzling text. Because causal/temporal connectives are suppressed, the reader cannot locate characters and events in space and time. The words he reads do not describe a coherent dramatic situation referring immediately to external reality (qtd. in Smitten 17).

(2) The reader must work out a syntax for the text. If conventional connectives no longer exist, the reader, to make sense of the text, must discover for himself what connections are to be made among the seemingly unrelated words and word groups...but the meaning of the text emerges only after the reader has discovered its internal relationships, its syntax (18).

Thus, the reader is forced to discover the syntax of the works by paying extra attention to the synchronic relationship among the seemingly disconnected word groups (19).

Graphic novels depart from the traditional comics just as novels have parted with the tradition of mimesis - the basis for realism - by disrupting their causal/temporal connectives. Graphic novels disturb the linear flow of action and the chronological order of events in favor of a more meditative reading, in creating ambiguous story worlds and characters, offering plurality of perspectives, promoting the apprehension of paradigms over syntagms. These

works are underscored by their desire of being there rather than getting there. In this process, basic strategies devised by the novel to attain spatial form are adapted on the comics medium.

Scrambling the time scheme, inserting full page diegetic fragments, upsetting the narrative resolution, supporting nonlinear imagery, offering multiple stories which imply the use of juxtaposed storylines are devices employed so as to promote internalized and subjective, speculative and metaphysical narratives where clock time is not the main decisive factor.

In the traditional comics, although the reader might recall earlier parts of the narrative, the main driving force is forward, toward consequences of that action, which promotes the sense of wonder reflected by the question what happens next?. The main interest of graphic novels is not to function within the domain of cause-effect relations so as to offer action as witnessed before, but to foreground themes. Once the action is disrupted, some sort of coherence is to be maintained at the thematic level. The mechanics of those unification devices rely on the compositional act of the reader.

As Roland Barthes suggests, the suppression of causal/temporal connectives necessitate that the meaning is

generated by tying fragments of events together. And by tirelessly transforming these events into functions the structure is erected. "The writer sees the inert units in front of him only by relating them", asserts Barthes (qtd. in Smitten 19).

Reflexive reference, that is, the reference of one part of the work to another as suggested by Joseph Frank, is key to spatial form. It is by means of reflexive reference that the syntax of a narrative is worked out (Smitten 20). Reflexive reference is achieved by many strategies. Graphic novels adopt them at the level of their tableau as well as on the whole of the book. Iterative, interchangeable structures are composed by these comics at the level of their tableau as stressed in section 3.2.1. On a more global level it is observed that graphic novels employ repetition of visual imagery; leitmotifs or extended webs of interrelated images; or codas that enclose the illusory time flow.

The notion of reflexive-reference is doubly emphasized by the structure of graphic novels, in that, the motifs they use are both verbal and visual. They operate actually at the level of the spatial picture plane which does not necessitate the extra effort exerted by the merely verbal form of the novel so as to achieve spatiality.

As opposed to the traditional serial comics in magazine format, the graphic novels deploy single stories with greater page count. The format took off with the revisionist stories of former icons. Freed from the continuity of the episodic comic books these graphic novels radically question the characters and storyworlds.

Will Eisner's The Spirit comics foresaw graphic novels in devising techniques to employ plurality of perspectives which marked the ambiguity of his story world. Two different locations of the same time dimension are layered throughout a story "The Christmas Spirit" dated December 19, 1948 (qtd. in Spirit Casebook 80-81). This story provides a plurality of worlds which contrasts a band of poor, well-meaning kids to a vicious criminal who is transformed by entering the adjacent spatial dimension of the well-intentioned individuals (fig 3.18). Eisner's influence can be traced in the works of those creators which started a revisioning of the linear form and the traditional themes and characters.

Frank Miller's Daredevil comics which appeared in 1980, are marked with their layouts reminder of Eisner's. Similarly, in the two page spread taken from Daredevil: Gangwar originally published on July 1981 as Daredevil 172, it is observed that two distant, ongoing narrations are juxtaposed on the same page. While the page-long vertical panels recount the city of New York through an anonymous speaker in



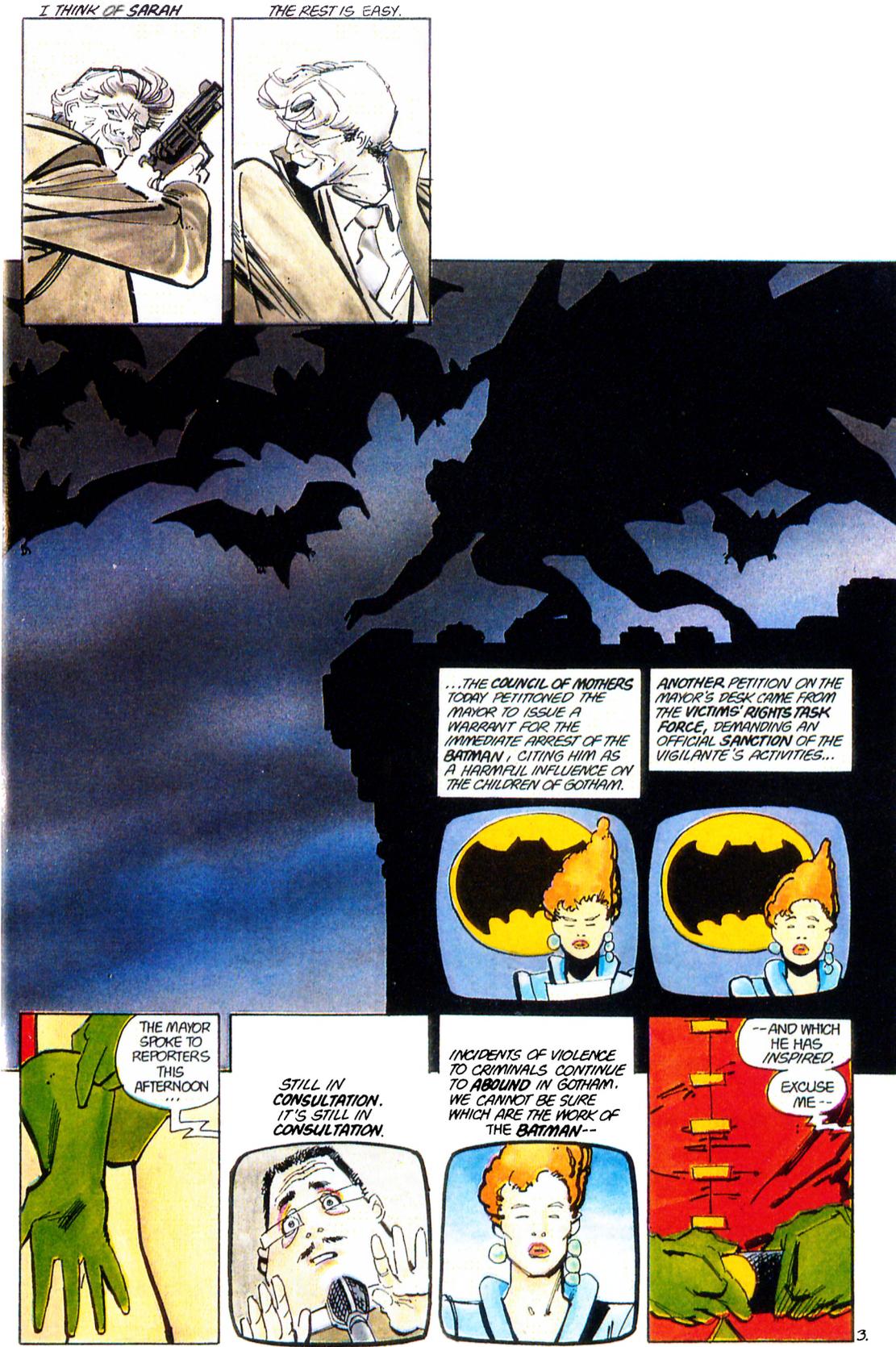
Figure 3.18

an informal manner, story action continues on the adjacent space (fig 3.19). However, it is Batman: The Dark Knight Returns which signals greater departures from chronological order and linear flow of the comics. Aided both by the fact that the story appeared outside the restricting comics continuity and was to be told over the space of 200 pages rather than the typical 22, Frank Miller radically questioned the Batman icon and monumental Gotham City by employing a host of techniques to undermine the totality of the story world and the forward thrust of the narrative.

The narrative juxtaposes multiple spatial dimensions on the same page throughout the book. In book 2 of Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, it is observed that, commissioner Gordon gets assaulted by teenage gang members when Robin overhears on TV the news, while getting dressed just as Batman on the background stalks the rooftops - accompanied with TV screens layered on the tableau (fig 3.20). Moreover, the reader is offered several perspectives conveyed through the captions coded by colors that signify the identities of their narrators in the first-person. The tainted blue captions over the panels signify Batman's presence, while the dark blue, yellow and the black ones remind the reader of the presence of protagonists Superman, Robin and commissioner Gordon respectively. When Batman's psyche darkens, however, captions attached to his presence turn into the color gray which marks an assault towards his fictional continuity. And



figure 3.20



the continuous insertion of TV screens between panels are further attempts in interrupting the forward movement of the narrative.

Alan Moore's Watchmen is another revisionist story which takes model for itself the heroic tales of comics as early as Alex Raymond's Flash Gordon or Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel's original Superman. A futuristic aura overwhelms the 400 page graphic novel which exhibits a decaying world with tired old heroes. Artist Dave Gibbons' lines which signal strong references to Alex Raymond's, are a conscious reference to a time which held utopian beliefs about the future. The story upsets these references by an ongoing destruction, defeat of the self-righteous heroes and concludes with an holocaust leaving few survivors. The temporal unity of the narrative is upset by the insertion of splash pages of clocks between chapters which are incremented a few minutes each time. According to this alternative temporal level the 400 page novel has lasted only 11 minutes when the clock has finally struck midnight. A variety of full page inserts ranging from diegetic autobiographical texts of the characters, excerpts of imaginary magazine articles, arrest forms, medical reports to the actual journal articles (3.21) or advertisings for the toys (fig 3.22) of the heroes confuse the diegesis of the graphic novel.

figure 3.21

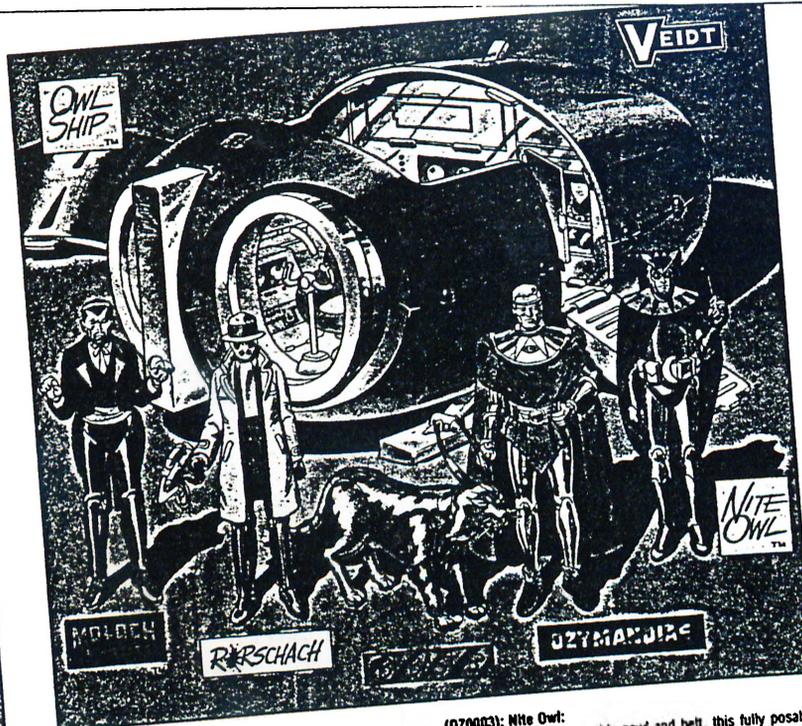


# BLOOD FROM THE SHOULDER OF PALLAS

BY DANIEL DREIBERG

**I**s it possible, I wonder, to study a bird so closely, to observe and catalogue its peculiarities in such minute detail, that it becomes invisible? Is it possible that while fastidiously calibrating the span of its wings or the length of its tarsus, we somehow lose sight of its poetry? That in our pedestrian descriptions of a

figure 3.22



**(OZ0001): Ozymandias:**  
This fully posable action doll, with removable cloak, tunic, and headband, is authentically molded to duplicate accurately the world-famous physique of athlete and former adventurer Adrian Veidt.

**(OZ0002): Rorschach:**  
New Figure! Fully jointed and posable, this scale facsimile of the feared vigilante has a removable trenchcoat and hat.

**(OZ0001): Rorschach's Grappling Gun:**  
New Accessory! This scale model of the famous gas-powered grappling gun is spring loaded, and will fire a miniature hook, along with a length of line. Safe for children over five.

**(OZ0003): Nite Owl:**  
New Figure! With removable cowl and belt, this fully posable model of the former nocturnal adventurer offers hours of exciting fun.

**(OZ0002): The Owlship:**  
New Accessory! Painstakingly assembled from existing photographs of this famous craft, our Owlship has an accessible and fully detailed cabin area, built to scale with OZ0003. Fully lighted cabin! Batteries not included.

**(OZ0004): Moloch:**  
New Figure! With detachable handgun and stage magician's jacket, now you can thrill to the misdeeds of the infamous crown prince of the underworld in the safety of your own home.

**(OZ0003): Substia:**  
New Accessory! Fully posable, see the giant mutant Lynx of Ozymandias. Now she can help Adrian Veidt fight evil and help the innocent in your adventures, just like she does on TV.

Yes -  
Agree with you re: expansion of line. My study of recorded sales figures in a historical context suggests an increase in the sale of soldiers and action figures in times immediately prior to a period of anticipated war or bloodshed, and we should take advantage of this syndrome for as long as it lasts.

However, ethically very uncertain about Rorschach, Nite Owl and Moloch, plus accessories. Suggest instead we create costumed army of terrorists, introduce as main villains in Saturday cartoon, then duplicate here along with weapons, accessories and vehicles. More militaristic flavor will sell better. The American public has never really gone in for super-heroes in a big way. We'll discuss this next week.

Best,  
Adrian Veidt

P.S. - found Substia. As soon as they're made, I must have one to give to her. Regards to Josephine and ...

Tues

Watchmen employs reflexive references to tie the fragmented narrative. The smiley face acts as a strong motif which echoes throughout the book tying it thematically. It also serves as a coda which signals the recursive quality of the seemingly forward flowing action (fig 3.23 and 3.12).

Frank Miller's Give Me Liberty: An American Dream, a similar graphic novel, repeats strategies invented by the Watchmen. Artist Dave Gibbons still renders such characters reminder of Alex Raymond's futuristic Flash Gordon. The character Moretti, in the graphic novel poses to be a cynical caricature of Raymond's valiant hero (figures 3.24, 3.25). However futuristic, Give Me Liberty: An American Dream portrays a place far from the glamour of Flash Gordon's fantasy world - with on screen depiction of violence never witnessed before in those traditional comics (fig 3.26). The tale which extends from 1995 to the year 2010 reflects a world where all that is feared has turned into reality. It is the survival quest of a young black woman in an hostile society, a police state run by a fascist dictator. A number of diegetic inserts, interrupting the continuing action help slow the pace of the narrative so as to promote a more meditative apprehension of the overall theme rather than an anticipation of the consequences of action. Among these are magazine articles, fax messages, a presidential executive order sheet, and several promotional posters (fig 3.27).

figure 3.23

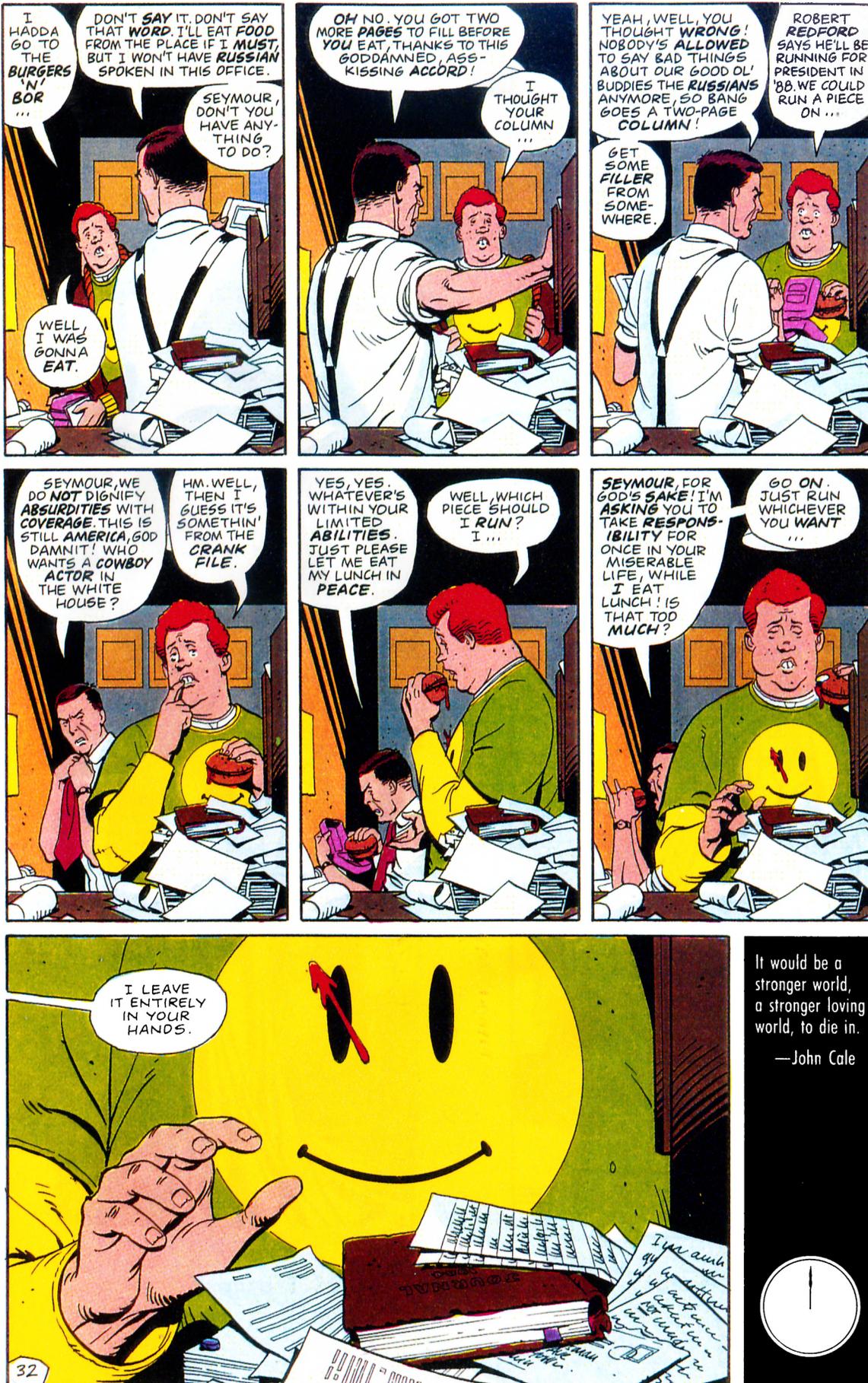




figure 3.24

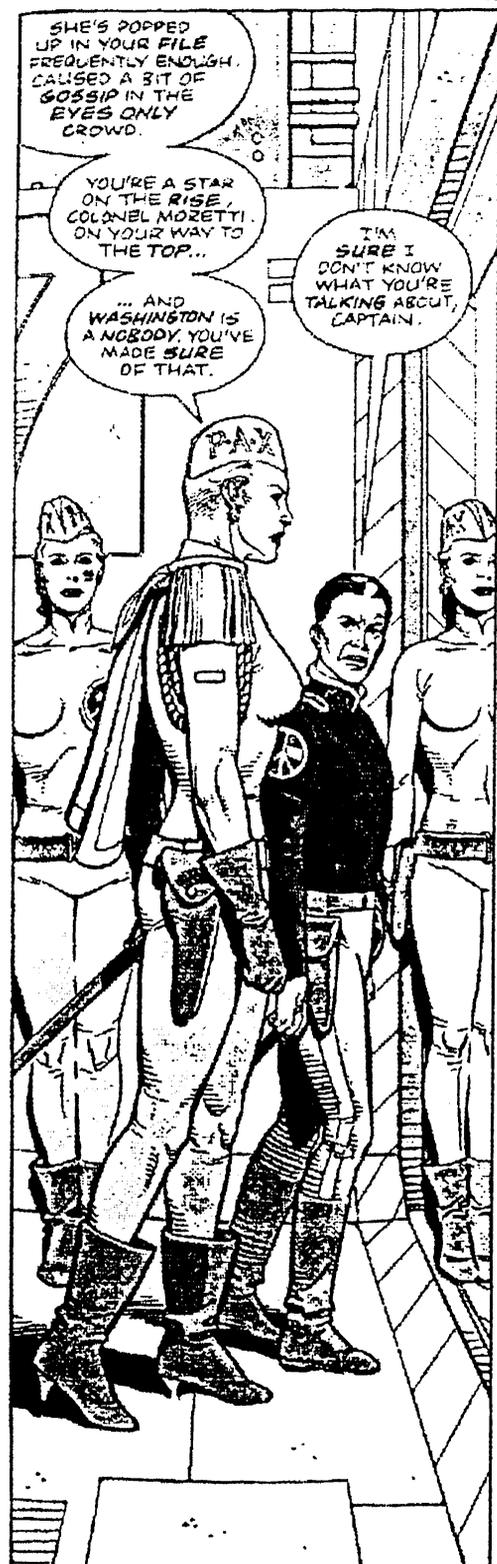


figure 3.25



figure 3.27



Moreover, the black and white map on the opening page and back flap of the book also serve as a reflexive reference. As a mediator, an identical map has also been inserted in the middle of the book. The shattered map that appears on the back flap triggers a backwards movement which takes the reader to the undisturbed map on the first page and brings about the conclusion that during the course of the narrative America has disintegrated (fig 3.28). With these inserts dimensions of the story world are made material and spread out in space.

As a revisionist Batman tale, Alan Moore's collaboration with artist Brian Bolland, Batman: The Killing Joke attempts to put its protagonist into a delicate position which puts forward an interrogation. In this 48 page graphic novella, Batman's archvillain Joker puts him through a test by challenging his integrity. Batman is made to face the question of which world is this? rather than the former what am I going to do in it? A contest of sanity vs. madness, order vs. chaos is explicitly staged which concludes with no apparent resolution. Narrative is to recur with the coda signaled by the repetition of the panel which has opened the book (figures 3.29, 3.30). Unity of action is disrupted by constant interruptions of a simultaneous storyline which in time reveals to be an apparent flashback. So, the story has served as a backdrop to the theme to be conveyed.

figure 3.28

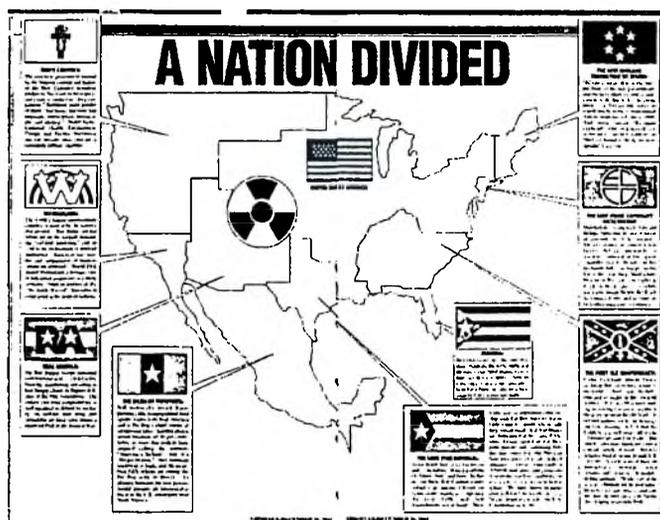
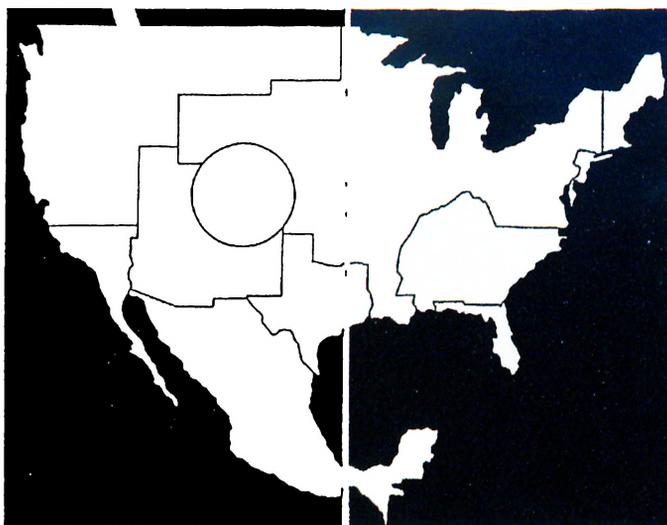


figure 3.29





A common approach among graphic novels is their exclusion of the thought balloon which tended to assert an omniscient perspective translated into the first-person inner voice. Unlike the third-person perspective of the traditional comics which tend to objectify the events, the captions of Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, for example, juxtapose several first-person perspectives. In Batman: The Killing Joke the captions are removed altogether. Absence of an authorial voice encourages interpretation, intensifies the prospects for multiple perspectives.

Another revisionist tale Superman: Under A Yellow Sun, reflects the inner conflicts of the former icon. His efforts to preserve his integrity are observed in two juxtaposed story worlds that transgress each other. One is the actual world of Superman, the other is the imaginary world created by his alter ego Clark Kent in the pages of his novel Superman: Under A Yellow Sun. Clark Kent's novel reflects suppressed desires. His protagonist - a rebellious adventurer - explicitly makes love, and at a moment of rage, attempts to kill. At this instance, the two worlds are juxtaposed when the novel captions transgress Superman's diegesis (fig 3.31). Actually the author will rewrite that section once his temper is restored.

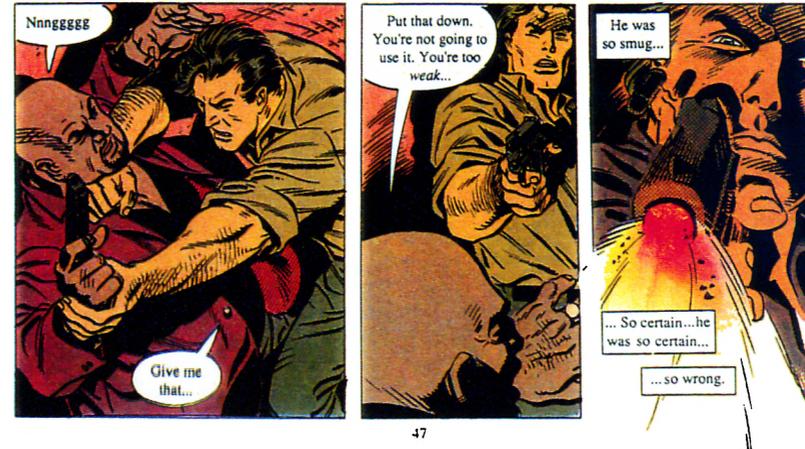
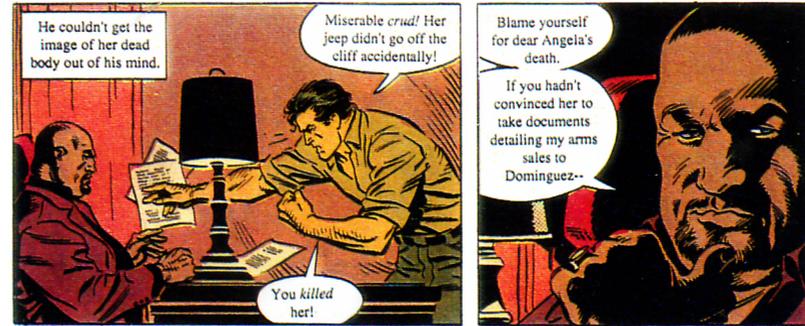
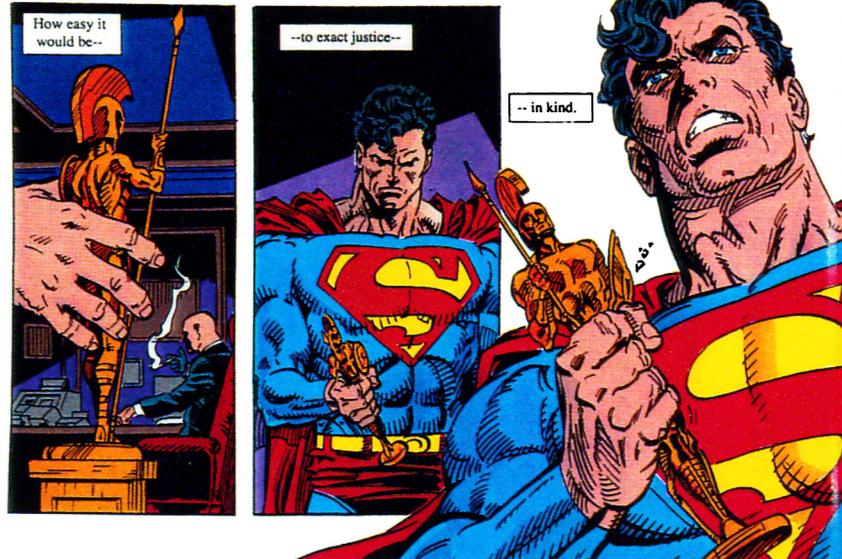


Figure 3.31

Differences between these two story worlds are emphasized by the apparent divergence of the page layouts, colors and rendering style: The two different worlds are rendered by two different artists. Apparently, there continues another conflict at the level of the fictional and the actual worlds. This is underlined by the fact that the real creators - that is, of the graphic novel - are simply acknowledged by Clark Kent at the end of the book which is packaged like a novel written by himself (fig 3.32).

Graphic Novels start with problematizing established icons and continue with creation of their own fragmented antiheroes. The semi-autobiographical Mr.Punch which mediates the unclear childhood recollections of the writer, or the biographical Voodoo Child which illustrates the life and music of the psychedelic rock star Jimi Hendrix are far from depending on the linear succession of events, their aim being exclusively to convey themes through the various paradigms introduced within the pages. In Voodoo Child priority of thematic unity over temporal flow is emphasized by the juxtaposition of captions that contain song lyrics (3.33). These captions tie the book thematically pushing the life story to the background. In Mr.Punch, the ambiguity of the story world is underlined by its non-linear rendering style (as discussed in 2.2.2) which reflects the ambiguity of the memories of childhood.

figure 3.32

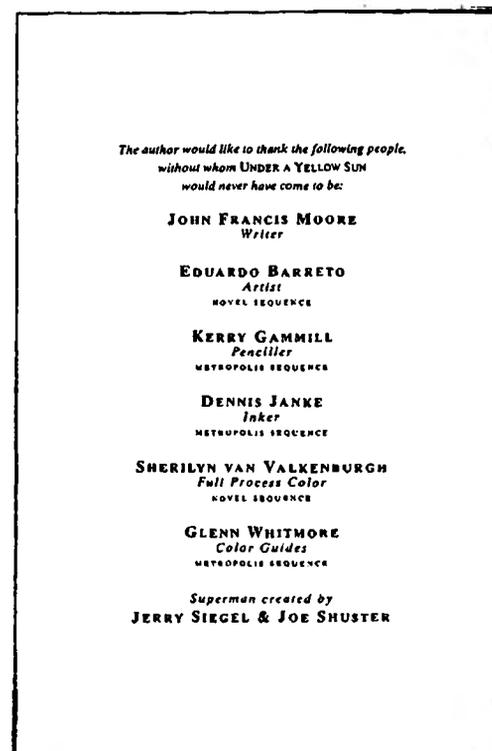
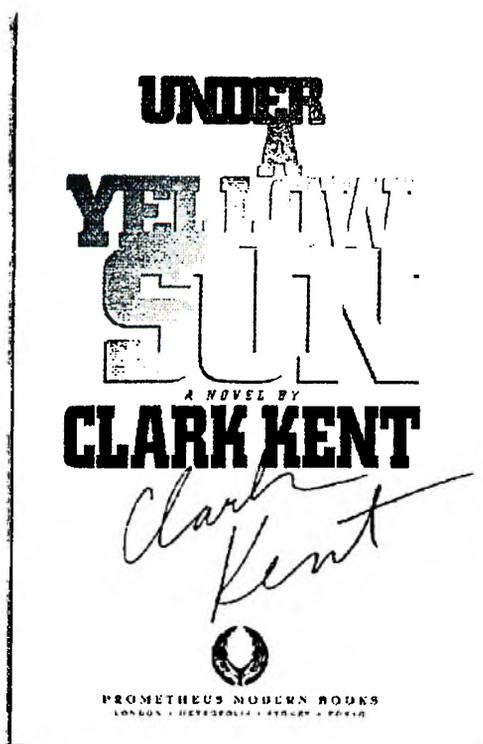
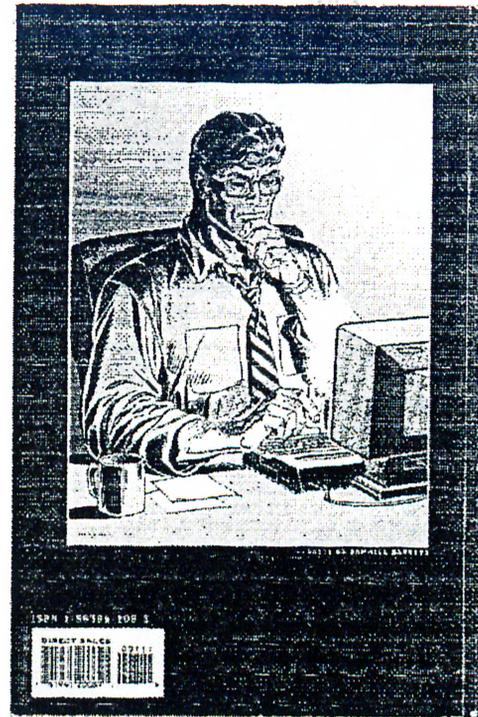
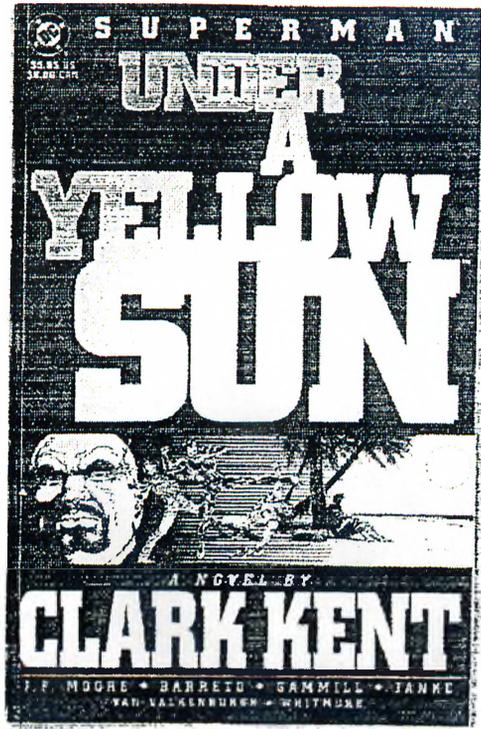


figure 3.33



All these graphic novels at different levels exemplify fragmented narratives. And building a sense of unity among the fragments increasingly relies on the compositional act to be taken by the reader which in turn problematize the unity of the story worlds and emphasize the subjectivity of the characters.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION: DRAWING ON THE POLITICS OF THE HERO AND THE GRAPHIC NOVEL FORM

The creative course of comics form, in an attempt to question the singularity of the fictional world and the integrity of the character echoed the process that literary fiction had been through, and shared similar strategies with literature appropriated on the specific character and the capacities of the medium.

Artistic strategy of modernist fiction was to devise ways for self conscious overturning of 19th century positivist realism. Realist fiction started out with the premise that there is a positively determinable world external to the world of fiction. And that this world is a cosmos - that is, "a complete, integrated system of phenomena governed by some coherent scheme of rules...whose only obscurity derives from its vast diversity and complexity, and whose truthful

delineation depends ultimately on the comprehensiveness and rationality of its description" (Nash 8). Furthermore, for providing references, essentially right procedures are those of mimesis, which refers to "material transcription of the empirically verifiable data (the objects) of the physical senses" (8). The basis for realist fiction extends that,

just as in the 'actual' world at any moment we may not have access to all the information we may seek on a given subject and consequently must strive to assess the probable truth based on the most exhaustive collection of information possible - fiction too should direct its attention towards an exhaustive disclosure of the 'facts' ('the whole truth') and the presentation, finally, of what is most probable according to our past experience of the actual world, particularly as exemplified by the procedures of history and science (Nash 9).

Finally, given the complexity of each individual consciousness which poses an obstacle before the perception of reality, efforts must be made towards the most objective articulation of the data as possible (Nash 9). Thus a declarative mode underscore realist fiction powered by the assertive narrative voice which proposes to be transparent. For the character realist fiction proposes, "a conception of person which contains, which confers on the flow of represented 'thought'...a persistent shapeliness, consistency, and even moderate predictability within the context of the world about it" (Nash 14). The character or the protagonist at the center, maps our expectations. Through the clarity of the character's insight or values, we

are guided towards "what to look for, what it all 'means'" (Nash 29).

In opposition to this objective discourse which depended on an unambiguous causal conception of the universe, modernist fiction tended towards "subjective distortion" of the story world (Hoffman-Barth 425). The story world is no longer a field of mimetic depiction within an objective perspective, but rather an ambiguous one that offers plural perspectives. The narrative attempts to frustrate conventional expectations concerning "unity and coherence of plot and character and the cause-and-effect development" (425).

While modernism have questioned the divinity, heroism or integrity of the character, at a further step postmodern fictional theory problematizes the unity of the subject. As Honi Haber summarizes:

Fictional characters had previously been understood in terms of their unity and completeness or self-sufficiency. Once the character has been laid before the reader in its entirety, the "meaning" of such character remains stable; we come to expect certain actions to follow from the kind of person the author has drawn for us....Character fixes essential traits which in turn constitute the uniqueness or singularity of that individual (483).

The claim for antihero by the postmodernists, is that the character is "something which is to be figured out, understood, read" as something which is to be "offered up to interpretation" (Helene Cioux qtd. in Haber 483). The same

person can possess different identities and desires, and the corresponding actions that appropriate to each of those identities are not necessarily equal (Haber 489). This very notion strikes at the heart of the moral integrity of the hero. The former questions were "how can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?" Now the questions asked by the hero are rephrased as "Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves are to do with it?" (McHale 1).

Comics form had started out as an anticipation of cinema. A desire to represent motion was embedded in the conception of the medium. Succession of pictures was ideal in depicting peaceful, fluid, forward flowing action. The linear rendering style eased to customize the heroic ideal which was to be objectified in the cartoon. This projection of the ideal on the visual representation of the figure led to creation of omnipotent, dynamic heroes who belonged exclusively to the world of comics. Flat colored costumes, and the almost architectonic figure in line art coded the iconicity of the heroes and established them as recognizable symbols. The linear artwork helped preserve the unity of their worlds. The traditional comics supported the belief that the dynamic, self-assured hero could right the wrongs in the cosmic domain, the orderly story world.

Graphic novels upset this picture, in that, the comics form is activated to betray the hero. In the beginning, the icon is deformed which was both reflected at the visual and verbal levels. The perspectives are pluralized by the juxtaposition of different points of view of the story world. The hero who was characterized by external traits retires from those activities he was largely engaged in concerning the outside world, in favor of a preoccupation with his internal domain where the questions change: It is time for introspection. Once deconstructed by the revisionist storylines, a new form is reconstructed. This form allows plurality of characters and worlds. The heroics of the character is replaced by self-doubt, and vulnerability. The succeeding characters are not marked by the integrity of their actions, or with the predictability of their judgements. As reinforced by the form, we make sense of the character by composing a cluster of images. While traditional panels used to pretend to be continuous strings, graphic novel panels underline the fact that they are potentially disparate fragments not tied by temporal, chronological order, but by a relational act of meditating between the array of paradigms. With the graphic novel format, comics recognize their very elemental basis that depends on the notion of spatiality. Departing from this recognition, it is observed that, the revision in the formal politics have reflected a transformation in the hero depicted.

Same strategies were taken by the novel in its divergence from the politics of realism. A common question of fiction is at hand, and comics medium being a relatively raw and unfamiliar fictional form have recently began to tackle these questions discovering the mechanics inherent to it.

## GLOSSARY

Caption is usually a rectangular frame that contains narrator's voice on the comics page.

Closure concerns the aptitude of the human brain to make sense of a confusing situation. Where the information available is incomplete the brain draws on previous experience to make up the rest of the picture (Welton 135).

Comic strip is the comics format which is constituted of several evenly sized panels aligned side by side on a horizontal rectangular area or a whole page of strips which appear on newspapers.

Comic book refers to the magazine format comics which tell stories on a single theme throughout several pages. Comic books are largely periodical publications. In this study, the term "comic book" usually refers to the United States format which indicates the serialized 22 page comics.

Gutter, refers to the space between comics panels.

Narrative Perspective indicates the voice of a story, the speaker who is doing the narration.

Omniscient Narrative Perspective refers to the third-person point of view when the speaker not only presents the action and dialogue of the work, but also knows and reports how the characters are responding and thinking.

Panel is usually a rectangular shape which frames a given illustration on the comics page.

Panel border is the outline of the comics panel. The border serves as a narrative element as well as a narrative support.

Sound effect is the indicator of sound in comics, through onomatopoeic words executed in expressive calligraphy.

Speech Balloon is the regular indicator of speech which contain the dialogue spoken by the characters.

Speed lines in comics emphasize objects in fast motion.

Splash page is conventionally the first page of a comic book, because the first page of a story functions as an introduction. The splash page serves as a frame of reference for the traditional comic book story.

Tableau of the graphic novel, refers to the basic narrative unit which consists of a single-page or a double-page spread of the contemporary comics.

Thought balloon is the container of the inner voice of the character.

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